Re-examining the 'Poet of Felicity' : desire and redemption in the theology of Thomas Traherne

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Desire and Redemption

in the Theology of Thomas Traherne

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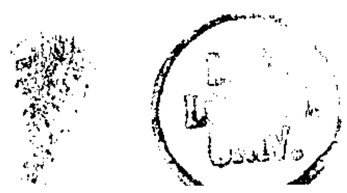

Re-examining the "Poet of Felicity" : Desire and Redemption in the Theology of Thomas Traherne

Abstract

This thesis begins by tracing the critique of Traherne as the "Poet of Felicity". In contrast to the notion of Traherne the naïve and contented, it explores the dark side of felicity, that shadow of desire without which felicity has no depth, in order to urge a new reading of this often misread poet and theologian. The thesis is primarily theological but refers to the literary tradition. It includes recent manuscript discoveries -- *The Ceremonial Law*, and the five prose works of the *Lambeth Manuscript*. Its aim is to redefine Felicity in the light of Desire and Redemption in Traherne.

Chapter two considers Desire and sexuality in Traherne and balances his insistence that desire should be passionate with his high view of prudence. It explores Infinity, and the insatiablility that arises when infinite desire is expressed in a finite frame. It culminates in a consideration of divine desire: "You must want like a God that you may be satisfied like God." Want that is infinite and eternal, that is both passionate and prudent, insatiable want that speaks of infinite capacity, the want by which we know our treasures, is the want of Traherne's redemptive desire.

Chapter three considers desire and treasure, prizing and the importance of renewed vision. Traherne's links with the Cambridge Platonists are discussed.

Chapter four has to do with issues surrounding Desire and Act such as liberty, grace and hope. It defines the human position such that human desire can matter and it asserts both that acts that are morally good must be rooted in desire and that our desire has the power to please God.

Chapter five concerns the dynamic of gift and receipt whereby the satisfaction of desire is attained. The experience of longing, the call of 'Som great thing', our need of and response to an Other, is explored as part of Traherne's doctrine of Circulation and Communication. Ultimately, in communion and union with God, the soul may find felicity, not as the end state of a linear progress, but as a continuing experience of satisfaction and renewed desire.

Introduction

Underlying this study is my belief that Desire, in several forms and by many names, is fundamental to Thomas Traherne's thought and structures, that he is, in this sense, primarily a writer of desire. He has been dubbed the "Poet of Felicity"[1] and for generations studied not so much as a theologian as a second rate late metaphysical poet. My first chapter traces the critique of Traherne, examining how this label came to be attached to him and with what effect, before moving on to chart the course of the critique so far. This is particularly important in light of the recent manuscript discoveries which I believe will significantly alter the way Traherne is read since the concerns of the newly discovered manuscripts are primarily, and more specifically than ever before, theological. What we are witnessing in the study of Traherne is a departure, and the question the first chapter seeks to answer is a departure from what. The thesis as a whole is primarily theological but it begins with and refers to the literary tradition. Its aim is to redefine Felicity in the light of Desire and Redemption in Traherne and in so doing to also affirm Traherne as primarily a theologian.

As a theologian, it is really the soul's progress that is Traherne's concern. Desire is not always his explicit theme, it is more often implied; but it is the engine of his soul's progress nevertheless. As I hope to demonstrate in chapter two, desire underpins all of Traherne's thought and is implied ubiquitously in his work. And so the subsequent chapters on Treasure, Choice and Communion emerge not so much as discrete categories

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[1] By Bertram Dobell and others, see notes 17 ff.

(though there is a kind of progress through them) as excursions anchored in Desire. Chapters three to five revolve around the primary theme, exploring different faces and features of desire and the way desire functions as a means to felicity. Chapter three sees desire as a kind of "treasure-maker". Chapter four defines the human position such that human desire can matter and it asserts both that acts that are morally good must be rooted in desire and that our desire has the power to please God. Chapter five explores the dynamic of gift and receipt by which the satisfaction of desire is attained. Throughout the thesis the themes of treasure, choice and communion recur, not always in their allotted chapters. I have allowed this permeability as a reflection of Traherne's own approach to his themes as noted by Joan Webber[2].

This means there is an overlapping in the thesis not unlike that found in Traherne's work itself. And this is a danger, both for Traherne and for the writer of this thesis. Malcolm Day believes Traherne's apparent digressions and repetitions form the very basis of his style. Rosalie Colie believes that they reinforce and deepen the awareness of truth. She contends that Traherne operates much as does paradox, in circles and spirals: "Paradox begins an infinite *action*, not an infinite progress;" writes Colie, it demonstrates, rather than argues simple truths. "It demonstrates that fact by its own operation, circling and spiralling about its central fixed point, always deepening, thickening, reinforcing our

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[2] "Largely because of the interconnectedness of all Traherne's themes (another communion), it is not always possible to confine a theme or discussion of it to the century of its central location. The more all-encompassing a theme, the more radiant its effects throughout the whole book." : *The Eloquent 'I':Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose.*(1968), (hereafter *TEI*) p.233.

awareness of how multiplex any simple truth is."[3] I hope to avoid the piling of synonyms and parallel phrases that Traherne employs, but repetitions and apparent digressions will appear in this thesis. These both reflect the nature and form of the works studied and serve the important purpose of reinforcement and demonstration Colie notes above.

The study of a theologian/poet must take into account the tensions of treating poetry and prose together, and there have been critics who have avoided this difficulty by taking a primarily prose approach to Traherne and those who do poetry only studies[4]. Some of the 'poetry only' studies are concerned with defending his poetry which has often been seen as the younger sister of his prose[5]; some authors seem to like the manageability and neatness which the discrete unit of a poetic sequence provides, others treat his poetry as part of a larger project whose concerns are primarily poetic (eg. Barbara Lewalski). Those critics who treat both his poetry and his prose, like Stanley Stewart and Richard Douglas Jordan and Day are perhaps the most effective at noting his overarching patterns of thought. Largely for this reason, and because Traherne himself often employs both genres in the same work and even in consideration of a single idea (witness the *Commentaries of Heaven* where prose meditations often end in poetry, or *The Kingdom of God* in which prose is interspersed with poetry; as well as the poetry included in the *Centuries* and in *Christian Ethicks*) in this study I will privilege neither, citing from his

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[3] Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, (hereafter *Paradoxia*) p519. Colie sets out the perils of paradox on p.520.

[4] Contrast for example, Martz whose *Paradise Within* concerns itself mainly with the *Centuries* with, Clements whose *Mystical Poetry* treats the poems.

[5] The primacy of the poetry or prose is not a concern of this thesis.

poetry and his prose interchangeably. The fact that the five prose works of the Lambeth Manuscript are not yet available in print and that there are no outlying articles that can bear any of the weight of criticism for these works has necessitated longer quotation and comment than might otherwise have been used. This has resulted an overall increase in the word count of the thesis.

I am indebted to the late Jeremy Maule whose friendship and discussion greatly aided my early work on this thesis, to Calum McFarlane whose reading of Traherne has fed my own, to Brian Horne, my supervisor, for his perspicacious questions and comments which guided my work and for his unflagging support, to Nabil Matar who provided copies of articles he had written which were to me otherwise unobtainable, to Leigh DeNeef for his later contributions, and to the Lambeth Palace Library, the British Museum, the Bodleian Library and the Folger Library who aided my work by allowing me access to manuscripts and allowing their manuscripts to be copied onto microfilm.

Abbreviations of Traherne's Works:

RF.	*Roman Forgeries*	
CE.	*Christian Ethicks*	
C.	*The Centuries of Meditations*	
SM.	*The Select Meditations*	
MSD.	*Meditations on the Six Days of Creation*	
ITR.	*Inducements to Retiredness*	[Lamb.MS.1360]
SE.	*Seeds of Eternity*	[Lamb.MS.1360]
L.	*Love*	[Lamb.MS.1360]
SV.	*A Sober View of Doctor Twisse...*	[Lamb.MS.1360]
KOG.	*The Kingdom of God*	[Lamb.MS.1360]
TCL.	*The Ceremonial Law*	[Folger.MS V.a.70]
COH.	*Commentaries of Heaven*	[BL.Add MS. 63054]
CB.	*The Commonplace Book*	[Bod.MS.Eng.Poet.c.42]
CYB.	*The Church's Yearbook*	[Bod.MS.Eng.Th.e.51]
EN.	*The Early Notebook*	[Bod.MS.Lat.Misc.f.45]
FN.	*The Ficino Notebook*	[BL.MS.Burney 126]

Chapter 1: Tracing the Critique

The development of a critique of the works of Thomas Traherne is unique amongst writers of the seventeenth century. Based as it is, not on the one work published in his lifetime, nor on the posthumous second work, but primarily on manuscripts that came to light at the turn of the twentieth century, it is a critique some two hundred years younger than most. Furthermore, the manner in which his manuscripts have continued to appear has meant that it is a critique without the reassuring foundation of a completed canon. And yet, the critique is more confident than provisional in its attachment to the word 'felicity'. That Traherne is 'the poet of Felicity' remains undisputed. How that label came to be attached to Traherne and what it has meant alongside the evolving critique of Traherne is the subject of this first chapter.

The early critique of Traherne is based on rather fragmented beginnings. First there was *Roman Forgeries*[6], printed in Traherne's lifetime, but not, it is thought, his best work. It has been thought dry and difficult; it is sometimes polemical and its tone is academic,

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[6] The full title is: *Roman Forgeries or a TRUE Account of False Records Discovering the Impostures and Counterfeit Antiquities of the CHURCH of Rome By a Faithful Son of the Church of England.* This was the only work to be published in his lifetime although it may be that he was working on other projects for publication. In his introduction to *COH*, Douglas Chambers notes that although *Commentaries* "does not appear to have been a fair copy of an earlier manuscript, there are suggestions in the manuscript of Traherne's having had a larger work in mind.". Certainly, Traherne wrote it for a broad audience; unlike his *Centuries* which are dedicated to a particular Christian friend, *COH* is written for general use, "For ye Satisfaction of Atheists, & ye consolation of Christians," and as a kind of encyclopedic commonplace book intended, probably, for use by devout persons, especially clerics. Similarly, Jeremy Maule notes (paper given at the Thomas Traherne Conference, Brasenose College, 30 July 1997) alterations and corrections in *KOG* that are congruous with the kind of alterations made on manuscripts being prepared for publication. And so it may be that Traherne intended to make more of his work available than was published in his lifetime.

which may be why it was once considered a kind of thesis, perhaps a masters thesis[7], intended for a particular scholarly readership. The sentences are long, the arguments repetitive, the assertions many[8].

Christian Ethicks, prepared for publication in his lifetime but printed posthumously, followed in 1675. It is clear that Traherne intended this work for a broad audience -- anyone "in need of help". In his address to the reader he writes:

> "The design of this treatise is not to stroke and tickle the fancy but to elevate the soul and refine its apprehensions, to inform the judgement and polish it for conversation, to purify and enflame the heart, to enrich the mind, and guide men that stand in need of help in the way of virtue; to excite their desire, to encourage them to travel, to comfort them in the journey, and so at last to lead them to true felicity, both here and hereafter."[9]

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[7] see Gladys Wade, *Thomas Traherne: A Critical Biography*, (hereafter *TT:B*) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944. pp 63-68. See also Margoliouth, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, I. xxxviii: "It is indeed quite likely that...*Roman Forgeries* is the seventeenth-century equivalent of a modern B.D. thesis." Traherne took his B.D. in 1669, so if *Roman Forgeries* is a thesis, its composition date would be before that. However, Carol Marks has shown that in *RF* Traherne was working from the *Commentarius* of Galasius published by Labbe and Cossart in 1671, two years after he took his B.D.(Marks, "Traherne's Church's Year-Book" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* [hereafter *PBSA*], vol. 58(1964): 31-72. especially pp. 60-61). Day's investigations indicate that Traherne must have been writing at least the final parts of *RF* as late as 1673 since he quotes a sermon by Stillingfleet delivered on 21 September, 1673 in his front material "A Premonition". (for details see Day, *Thomas Traherne*, [hereafter *TT*] p. 88-89.) This is just four days before *RF* was entered in the Stationer's Register. Day's thesis is that *RF* was written as a response to the Declaration of Indulgence, the Third Dutch War and the pro-Catholic policies that had driven the Bridgeman family into retirement.

[8] It is true that *Roman Forgeries* is a case of rhetoric upon rhetoric. And yet, I would suggest, the work is very much more than simple invective. His gathering and presenting of evidence shows Traherne as a serious scholar, well-read in documents of early church history, whose detailed textual research serves his serious and sincere aim of religious certainty.

[9] Botrall, *The Way To Blessedness*. Faith Press, 1962, p5.

This is not an unambitious design. And yet it seems the work fell quickly into obscurity, as if it were, as one critic put it, 'still-born from the press'[10]. It would be nearly three hundred years before Margaret Botrall's 1962 modernised version presented *Christian Ethicks* once again to the notice of the general public[11].

A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation... fared no better in terms of locating Traherne's genius, published as it was without clearly identified authorship, since the note in the "Address to the Reader", which identifies the author only as a private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, omitted Traherne's name[12]. Confusion and misattribution continued when his next work to be published trickled out to the public in three parts, over the space of thirty-two years, in reverse order, bowdlerised and wrongly attributed to Mrs Susanna Hopton, who was thought to be Traherne's 'friend' of the *Centuries*[13]. Fifty-three years after his death Traherne's work had already slipped certainly into obscurity if not oblivion.

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[10] Dobell, introduction to *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, xlvii.

[11] Two of its thirty-three chapters did surface in a 1942 publication (*Of Magnanimity and Charity*. John Rothwell Slater, New York: King's Crown Press), but this is such a small fraction of the work as to make the impact of its appearance practically negligible.

[12] This work was published anonymously in 1699 by Dr Hickes.

[13] In 1673, Part III of *A Collection of Meditations and Devotions in Three Parts* was printed as *Daily Devotions, consisting of Thanksgivings, Confessions and Prayers* and was attributed to Mrs Susanna Hopton. In 1685, Part II of *A Collection...* was published in Philip Traherne's 'reduced' version as *The Soul's Communion with her Saviour*. When the entire work was completed in the publication of *A Collection of Meditations and Devotions* in 1717 by Nathaniel Spinckes, the work was again attributed to S. Hopton. Part I of this 1717 publication is in fact Traherne's *Hexameron* or *Meditation on the Six Days of Creation*. See notes 64-65 for further discussion of authorship.

From these faltering beginnings, through two hundred years of silence, the history of Traherne's work comes to an amazing discovery which excited a flurry of interest. The story of the finding of Traherne's manuscripts for the *Centuries* and the first published poems is well known and has been detailed in various articles[14]. It is a fascinating story of how William Brooke, furrowing in London booksellers' bargain baskets, in 1897, happened upon two interesting looking manuscripts which he picked up for a few pence; how he sold them to Dr. Grosart who attributed them to Vaughan and who (conveniently for Traherne) died just before they were to be published under Vaughan's name; and how Bertram Dobell purchased these from the deceased Grosart's library and, discovering, eventually, a poem in *Christian Ethicks* to be identical with one in one of the manuscripts, found uncontrovertible evidence of Traherne's authorship.[15] And it is Dobell, in his first edition of Traherne's poems who first dubbed Traherne the 'Poet of Felicity'.

This point, the turn of the twentieth century, is particularly important because it was the comments and judgements of the first editors of Traherne's poetry, and of the *Centuries,* that shaped the critique which was to follow. Their critique of Traherne as a naive and simple poet of felicity whose excesses are expressions of a kind of childlike exuberance and whose thought, if incoherent, is nonetheless rather charming, laid the foundation for a

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[14] see: Introduction to Dobell's collection, see also: Osborn, "A New Traherne Manuscript", *The Times Literary Supplement* [hereafter*TLS*] 9 October 1964, p. 928. Elliot Rose, "A New Traherne Manuscript", *TLS*, 19 March, 1982, p. 324.; Hilton Kelliher "The Rediscovery of Thomas Traherne", *TLS*, 14 September 1984. p. 1038. See also Peter Beal's *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*. vol. 2. (1625-1700) pt 2. Lee-Wycherley London: Mansell. 1993.

[15] This story can be followed in the introduction to Dobell's 1906 edition of *Poetical Works*, pp.lxxvii ff.

century of criticism. Dobell, with all his enthusiasm for Traherne's work, which he introduced to the world in the following glowing terms:

> "the long night of his obscurity is at length over, and his light henceforth, if I am not much mistaken, is destined to shine with undiminished lustre as long as England or the English tongue shall endure"[16]

and who also praised him, as early as 1906, for exhibiting such qualities as eloquence, persuasiveness and sagacity, is also responsible for the first qualifying of that praise. "He often exhibits shrewdness and knowledge of human nature *which we would scarcely expect from him*."[17] Dobell writes. Why would we not expect it of him? Because he is a "happy soul"[18], a naive child, a baby. This is what the critics who read Dobell's introduction to the first volume of Traherne's poetry took away with them. And although Dobell predicted their criticisms of 'remote otherworldliness' and 'repetition' and condemned those criticisms as "unjust"[19], he failed to justify these qualities to his readers. There is no sense, in Dobell's introduction, of, for instance, the purpose of repetition in Traherne's style or of the consciousness of his choice to consider virtue even if at the exclusion of vice. And so Traherne's style and subject matter become matters of chance or mere accident. Thus, despite his enthusiastic assertions of Traherne's greatness, and even his praise for Traherne's impetuousness, "that 'impetuous rush of a

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[16] Dobell, P*oetical Works,* p. i.

[17] Ibid. p. liv. (italics mine).

[18] Dobell, *Poetical Works* , p. liii.

[19] Introduction, *Poetical Works,* pp. lxxii - lxxiii.

mind...lifted into ecstasy beyond itself'"[20] , despite his assertion that, in the most essential qualities of a poet, Traherne is greater than either Herbert, Crashaw or Vaughan[21], Dobell himself actually sets up the image of childlike naivity which will continue as Traherne's reputation for most of the twentieth century.

It should be noted that when Dobell published *The Poetical Works* in 1903, the Burney Manuscript with its collection of poems edited by Traherne's brother Philip was as yet unknown. And the contrast between the highly favourable early response to Dobell's publication and the later often more negative criticism of Traherne's poetry may be connected to H.I. Bell's 1910 publication of *Traherne's Poems of Felicity*, taken from Philip's version. Much of the negative early criticism is, in fact, of Philip's rather than of Thomas' poetry. The fact that after 1910 many critics cited from either version indiscriminately added to the confusion and slow development of the critique. And yet what all these critics had in common was an attachment to the term Felicity and to a childlike, otherworldly Traherne.

Early critics such as Gladys Willett (1919) and Frances Towers (1920) read Traherne differently, but both in accordance with this image, and by the mid-1930's, with Arthur Quiller-Couch (1934) taking up the negative side and Queenie Iredale (1935) [22] the

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[20] Op. cit. p. lxviii. Here he is quoting Milton.

[21] "I cannot help thinking that neither Herbert, Crashaw nor Vaughan can compare with Traherne in the most essential qualities of the poet. ..none of them has the vitality, the sustained enthusiasm, the power imparted by intense conviction, which we find in our author." *Poetical Works*, p.lxviii.

[22] See Gladys Willett, *Traherne: An Essay*[Heffer:Cambridge,1919] -- pretty much straight Dobell, to which was applied the literary critique of her day. Whereas Frances Towers, "Thomas Traherne: His Outlook on Life", [*The Nineteenth Century and After*. 87

positive of Dobell's original assertions, the image of Traherne the naive and simple, had solidified so that Gladys Wade's *Thomas Traherne* of 1944[23], with all of its scholarship and obvious admiration of Traherne's work, was, nevertheless, not so much breaking new ground as confirming a stereotype. Of course, the early critics were working from a much smaller corpus than Traherne scholars have today. James Osborn's 1964 discovery of the *Select Meditations* was still fifty years away and the charred *Commentaries of Heaven*, that would be the most significant single discovery since Brooke and Dobell, had not yet been rescued from its burning Lancashire rubbish heap, let alone brought to literary light, in 1982, in Toronto by Elliot Rose[24]. The critics at the early part of this century had, as we have noted, no access to an evolved critique such as might have been available to scholars of other seventeenth century divines, and not even the faintest inkling of the major discoveries which were to surprise the manuscript world in 1997, when Julia Smith and Laetitia Yeandle were to find an unfinished poem (1,800 lines of heroic couplets) entitled "The Ceremonial Law" in Washington D.C., whilst, at the Lambeth Palace Library in London, Jeremy Maule was busy identifying the *Lambeth*

(1920)pp. 1024-1030] is scathing in his criticism of Traherne's unrealistic otherworldliness. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Felicities of Thomas Traherne* [London, 1934] mentions the beautiful but ultimately childish quality of Traherne's thought. And Queenie Iredale, *Thomas Traherne*.[Oxford, 1935] although she damns his poetic voice: he "never had any conception of himself as an artist" (p.66.) nevertheless rhapsodises about 'felicity'.

[23] Gladys Wade, *TT:B*. Wade's work is still a standard text for any Traherne scholar, although her tendency to biographical speculation and sentimentality are two serious flaws.

[24] For the full details of this extraordinary discovery see Elliot Rose, "A New Traherne Manuscript", *TLS*, 19 March, 1982, p. 324. For details of Osborn's discovery see Osborn, "A New Traherne Manuscript", *TLS*, 9 October 1964, p. 928.

Manuscript: a vellum bound volume of 473 leaves containing no less than five new prose works. It is hardly surprising then, that they should have come up with the image of Traherne as a naive and childlike man, head in the clouds and feet in paradise.

And yet, it seems to me that, in coming to Traherne's work at first inauspiciously and then belatedly and always fragmentarily, we approached it from a kind of side alley, thinking that what we see first is the front; that right from the start we have mistaken Traherne, or only partly understood him. We have very nearly discarded him[25]. As the contemporary critic Leigh DeNeef writes, "the truth is that no modern scholar has ever considered Traherne a serious or original thinker."[26] This may be overstating the point. Louis Martz's *The Paradise Within* (Yale:1964) and John Wallace's "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation" (*ELH*, 1958) both offer insight into the notion of meditation or contemplation in Traherne's work. And Stanley Stewart's *The Expanded Voice* (Huntingdon:1970), followed closely by Richard Jordan's *The Temple of Eternity* (Kennikat:1972) both take Traherne's content and style seriously. Carol Marks' work, too, has been largely concerned with contextualising Traherne's thought both historically

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[25] It may be interesting to note that it was not unusual for Traherne to be omitted from 'comprehensive' studies or collections of Seventeenth century work. Basil Willey's highly esteemed work *The Seventeenth Century Background* (Chatto:1950) does not even give Traherne a mention. Nor was Willey alone in his editorial decision-- a quarter of a century earlier H.J.C. Grierson also omitted Traherne from his *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler.* (1925) These are just two examples from amongst many.

[26] Leigh DeNeef, *Traherne in Dialogue:Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida.* Duke University Press :Durham , 1988. (hereafter *TID*) p20.

and philosophically[27]. And yet there is something that rings true in DeNeef's assessment. Those who argue for an intelligent Traherne or for a poetic Traherne are arguing against the common consensus. Traherne is largely consigned, as DeNeef puts it, "to a second-class intellectuality"[28] as a thinker and as a poet.

Traherne's poetic faults, alluded to by Dobell, are enumerated more specifically in Willett's essay in which she writes:

> "His versification is sometimes faulty...He is always something of an amateur. He fills out his metre with 'do' and 'did' : he twists sentences the wrong way round : he is too fond of exclamatory phrases and strings of nouns : he uses the rhymes 'treasure' and 'pleasure' till they begin to irritate the reader... he has no real command of the medium"[29].

Nevertheless, as the 20th century progressed and more of Traherne's work came to light, study of his poetic proved fruitful. As Jerome Dees has noted[30], twentieth century criticism seems to fall into three stages. There is the first burst of enthusiasm, such as we see in Dobell, for his lyric verse. This seems to have waned as critics like Willett applied

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[27] Carol Marks, (ed.) *Christian Ethicks*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968. "Traherne's Church's Year-Book, *PBSA*. 58 (1964): 31-72. "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* [hereafter *PMLA*] 81 (1966): 521-534. "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus", *Renaissance News*[hereafter *RN*]. 19 (1966): 118-131. "Thomas Traherne's Commonplace Book", *PBSA*. 60 (1966): 458-465; "Traherne's Ficino Notebook", *PBSA*. 63 (1969):73-81.

[28] DeNeef, *TID*, p.20.

[29] *Traherne: An Essay*. p. 23-24. for other similar criticisms of his verse both early and more recent see, amongst others, the introduction to Bell *Traherne's Poems of Felicity* (Clarendon:1911) : "Indeed, it is probably true to say that Traherne is not primarily a poet at all. His verse is full of the material of poetry; it is continually preparing (so to say) to pass into poetry, ... but for the most part it remains imperfectly fused;" p.xxviii-xxix) and Douglas Bush (*English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century1600-1660*, Oxford: Clarendon: 1962. p.156) who describes Traherne as "the poet who is chiefly given to prosaic stumbling and incoherent diffuseness".

[30] "Recent Studies in Traherne" ,*English Literary History* (hereafter *ELH*).4 (1974): 189-96

the literary critique of their day and found him wanting. From the forties and fifties the preference gradually shifted to his prose, particularly the *Centuries*. (We may see Wade's work, among others, as fitting into and perpetuating this pattern.)[31] In the seventies and beyond the interest in his work seems to break roughly into two main veins -- 1) those who concern themselves with placing him in the historical and intellectual milieu of the seventeenth century, and 2) those whose interest is mainly in his poetic and the structure of his work. In the former category one could look to the well-known works of Marks on Traherne and the Neo-platonists, Traherne's seventeenth century and before sources, and questions of authorship and context[32] and to the work of Colie and Stephen Clucas on Traherne and the new sciences[33]. Julia Smith's perspicacious contributions clarify important details of biography and sources, and comment on the political and social world in which Traherne was writing[34]. Allan Pritchard makes links between

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[31] For a whole catalogue of praise for the *Centuries*, often compared directly to the poems see Zenas J. Bicket's thesis "An Imagery Study In Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*", D. Phil thesis, University of Arkansas, 1965. She cites Dobell, Willett, Helen White, Doris Wilson, Wade, and Mahood, among others, on the superiority of the *Centuries* and the poverty of the poems.

[32] See: Marks, "Traherne's Church's Year-Book, *PBSA*. 58 (1964): 31-72.; "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", *PMLA*. 81 (1966): 521-534.; "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus", *RN*. 19 (1966): 118-131.; "Thomas Traherne's Commonplace Book", *PBSA*. 60 (1966): 458-465. "Traherne's Ficino Notebook", *PBSA*, 63 (1969) 73-81. Marks, Carol. (ed.) *Christian Ethicks*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968. (introduction).

[33] See: Colie, Rosalie L. "Thomas Traherne and the Infinite: The Ethical Compromise", *Huntingdon library Quarterly* (hereafter *HLQ*), 21 (1957): 69-82.; and Clucas, Stephen. "Poetic atomism in seventeenth-century England: Henry More, Thomas Traherne and 'scientific imagination'", *Renaissance Studies*, 5:3 (1991): 327-340.

[34] See: Smith, Julia J. "Thomas and Philip Traherne", *Notes and Queries* (hereafter *N&Q*), vol. 231 (March 1986): 25-31.; "Thomas Traherne and the Restoration", *Seventeenth Century*,17 (Autumn 1988) Vol. III, 2: 203-222.; "Attitudes towards Conformity and

Traherne's *Commentaries of Heaven* and the philosophical and scientific world of the seventeenth century[35]. Nabil Matar's primary concern has also been to discuss Traherne in a social context or in relation to individuals and intellectual movements[36]. Whereas the studies of A.L. Clements and Alison Sherrington have given particular attention to the poetry on its own[37]. Naturally, some of the critical areas overlap, and so whilst these two veins of 'milieu' and 'poetic' may mark two lines of research and thought, they are hardly exclusive categories. Some of the most important recent Traherne work fruitfully crosses between the two areas of research. Sharon Cadman Seelig's study of the *Select Meditations* discusses both the socio-political setting of his work and its place in the development of his poetic voice[38]. Stewart's chapter on *Roman Forgeries*, the most thorough study available, concerns itself with both the poetic and socio-political features

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Nonconformity in Thomas Traherne", *Bunyan Studies*, vol. 1:1 (Autumn 1988): 26-35.; "Susanna Hopton: A Biographical Account", *N&Q*, vol. 236 (June 1991): 165-72. And the introduction to her edition of the *Select Meditations*.(Carcanet: Manchester. 1997).

[35] Allan Pritchard "Traherne's *Commentaries of Heaven* (With Selections from the Manuscript)". *University of Toronto Quarterly,* 53 (1983-84): 1-35.

[36] See: Matar, Nabil, "A Note on Thomas Traherne and the Quakers", *N&Q*. 226 (1981): 46-47.; "Prophetic Traherne: 'A Thanksgiving and Prayer for the *Nation*'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (hereafter *JEGP*), 81 (1982): 16-29.; "Thomas Traherne's Solar Mysticism", *Studia Mystica* (hereafter *SM*), VII:3 (Fall, 1984): 52-63.; "Thomas Traherne and St Bernard of Clairvaux", *N&Q*. 230 (1985): 182-184.; "The Temple and Thomas Traherne", *English Language Notes* (hereafter *ELN*), 25 (Dec. 1987): 25-33.; "Mysticism and Sectarianism in Mid-17th Century England", *SM*. vol. XI:1 (Spring 1988): 55-65.

[37] See A.L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1960 (hereafter *MP*); Alison Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, University of Queensland Press, 1970.

[38] Sharon Cadman Seelig. "The Origins of Ecstacy:Traherne's 'Select Meditations'". *English Literary Renaissance* (hereafter *ELR*), 9 (1979): 419-431.

of that work. The opening chapters of Day's *Thomas Traherne* give useful information on the socio-political and theological contexts of Traherne's work before going on to discuss his poetic.

What do these more recent scholars have to say in response to the kind of criticisms like those levelled by Willett (above) that in Traherne there are such faults as 'too many exclamatory phrases', and what Willett calls 'strings of nouns', or 'cataloguing', too much 'repetition', and 'contradiction'?

Traherne's catalogues have been a subject of interest for several critics in the second half of this century, particularly those whose interest is to understand the structural principles at work in his writings. Clements believes that understanding the catalogue in Traherne is imperative in understanding Traherne. He writes:

> "The catalogue, like the concentrated image, is indeed a pervasive characteristic of Traherne's poetry, of his appositive style, and to dismiss it is, in effect, to dismiss Traherne."

Clements continues:

> "The catalogue, a brief or extended listing of words, phrases, images, and so on, as found in, say Whitman, is well known....It gathers and focusses meaning--as the mirrors of a microscope concentrate the light upon the slide -- meanings which are central and vital to the poem;" and, changing the metaphor, he concludes: "the concentrated image explored is an atom exploded."[39]

The Expanded Voice, published the following year, viewed the cataloguing as evidence of what Stewart calls Traherne's 'additive' style[40]. Not only do the lists suggest the

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[39] "On the Mode and Meaning of Traherne's Mystical Poetry: 'The Preparative'", *Studies in Philology* (hereafter *SP)*, 61 (1964) 500-521. pp. 506-507. See also Clements' later and more substantial *MP*.

[40] Stewart's thesis is that because of Traherne's impulse to expand towards infinity, the boundaries of space and time are imploded. Traherne's structural 'building-block' in this is the process of addition.

infinity into which the human soul may expand, but by being 'unpruned' they allow a drift in "Traherne's technique toward an 'open' form representing a process of association, like reverie"[41]. Carl Selkin, in "The Language of Vision: Traherne's Cataloguing Style", gives detailed consideration to cataloguing in the *Thanksgivings* in particular. He sees Traherne's bracketing in the *Thanksgivings* as forcing the reader to read several things simultaneously, everything read, as all things consist, in an 'eternal now'. In his article he notes, as Stewart had done six years earlier, Traherne's conviction of the inadequacy of ordinary language [cf. the poems 'Silence', 'Dumbnesse'][42] and sees the catalogue as one way of attempting to express the ineffable. He even goes so far as to claim:

> "The style Traherne achieves might well be termed a 'redeemed' language, one in which the limitations he sees in ordinary language are abnegated or ameliorated, and the most distinctive feature of this language is the catalogue"[43]

As for Traherne's exclamations and exaggerations, they seemed to be alternately praised and vilified. Seelig writes, "His exclamatory style, so often criticised, is the voice of the discovering spirit, and the short exclamatory bursts embody successive stages of perception."[44] And she sees in his outbursts the same kind of fragmented revelatory

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[41] Stewart, op. cit. p. 209.

[42] Stewart, op cit. p. 176.; Selkin p. 92.

[43] Selkin, "The Language of Vision:Traherne's Cataloguing Style" *ELR*, 6(1976): 92-103, p93. Ronald McFarland also addresses the businesss of catalogues in a similar vein in "Thomas Traherne's Thanksgivings and the Theology of Optimism", *Enlightenment Essays*, 4:1 (Spring 1973): 3-14. arguing that "in the thanksgiving devotional the catalog has its most natural place. ...The value of the catalog lies in its ability to suggest abundance, magnitude, and munificence," p. 9.

[44] *The Shadow of Eternity: Belief and Structure in Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne*. Lexington; 1981. p. 123.

thought as may be found in the work of Francis Bacon in whose early essays "apparently undigested bits and phrases represent the mind in pursuit of truth, and contrast with the smooth prose of Dryden, which reflects the sociability of truth found."[45] Webber, on the other hand, finds his exclamations to be interruptions of a smooth style. They are excessive, hyperbolic and emotionally charged. She writes :

> "For the modern reader, the one probable intrusion [to otherwise unobtrusive techniques] occurs when the immediacy of Traherne's fresh perceptions, his insistence upon the moment-by-moment invention or discovery of the world, sometimes give his prose a hyperbolic pitch. A few of the paragraphs are overabundant in baroque emotional devices -- capitals, exclamations, hyperboles, excessive repetition, especially of certain key words, emotionally charged language and scenes"[46]

I suspect that whether one sees Traherne's exclamations as 'the voice of the discovering spirit' or as prose at 'a hyperbolic pitch' may depend on the temperament of the reader as much on the virtue of the poetic itself. Traherne himself believed his statements were in no way hyperbolic. In the *Centuries* he writes: "All Hyperbolies are but little Pygmies, and Diminutiv Expressions, in Comparison of the Truth"[47].

But what about the other criticisms of Traherne's poetic-- his 'repetition' and his 'contradiction'? As early as 1919, Willett, noting the lack of variety in his imagery, asserted that "the very nature of his constantly recurring images gives a certain aggregate sublimity to his prose."[48]. Martz saw Traherne's repetition as a technique for reminding

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[45] Seelig, op.cit. note 30 p. 188.

[46] Joan Webber, *TEI* p. 242.

[47] *C*.II.52. On Hyperbolie see also *SM*. III. 7 and *KOG*. 205r in which he claims that the Truth is "infinitly sublime, and far abov the Reach of all Hyperbolies: tho they be καθ ὑπερβολω ἐισ ὑπερβολω. Hyperbolies piled one upon another."

[48] Willett, *Traherne (An Essay)*, p. 55.

the memory in an Augustinian and Bonaventurian fashion[49]. But it was not until sixty years after Willett that Stewart explored the value of Traherne's repetition further. He writes:

> "The more one reads of Traherne the more he is struck by the incantatory, almost numinous effect of the repetition. Traherne piles up the words and phrases, taking pains to proliferate synonyms, as if the mere weight of the word itself ...were enough to summon forth the essence of the universe in this small part."[50]

Day has taken this idea furthest, seeing Traherne's repetition not as a weakness, but as the fundamental feature of his style.

> "Because Traherne's mind is always on this closeness of all things to God, his frequent failure to follow consistently the structural path he indicates for himself is not a digression from his point but rather a 'falling into' the true point from his starting position on the periphery....It is not by chance that Traherne's favourite image of God and eternity is the sphere, and his perception of God at the center of all reality enters into nearly everything he wrote, where it becomes the primary source of the repetitive, paralleling style that is his fundamental means of expression."[51]

Day goes on to show how repetitive paralleling patterns form the structure not only of his phrases, but of his works as well.

Let us now turn to that final criticism-- 'contradiction'. To me this is the most interesting of the criticisms, because it throws up the issue of paradox, which I believe to be central both to Traherne's poetic and his theology. Wherever you go in Traherne you find them -- those impossible couples, standing side by side, at once incongruent and harmonious.

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[49] See Louis Martz, *The Meditative Poem.* (New York:New York University Press, 1963) xxix-xxx,pp. 25-70; and *The Paradise Within* (New Haven:Yale University Press,1964) pp. 43-54.

[50] Stewart, *The Expanded Voice* (hereafter *TEV*), p. 71.

[51] Day, *TT,* p. 19.

The "learned and happy Ignorance" of "Eden"; the extended paradox which in, for instance, 'On leaping over the Moon" looks below, to the puddle beneath the poet's feet to see "another sky"; the exclamation, "Oh what a Thing is Thought!" ("Dreams" l.43) are just a few from his poetry. And then there are the paradoxes of his prose with which we are so familiar: Love whose "Excess is its true Moderation" (*C*.II.54.); Eternity which is both "a Mysterious A*bsence* of Times and Ages" and "an *Endless Length* of Ages *always present* and for ever Perfect." (*C*. V. 7.); God who both wants and has from all eternity (*C*. I. 43.) and who is never more God than when he is man (*C*. I. 90.).

Not surprisingly, the new Lambeth manuscript too bears its share of paradox. Consider this rather complicated extract on divine love from *Love*:

> "It is Wise and Holy by its essence. And tho it soundeth strange like a very Paradox, it is freely Wise, yet it cannot be otherwise. An Act of Lov is of its own pleasure Gracious, Good & Blessed, because it is an Act of Lov: yet it is so most necessarily, because it is an Act of Love. The very same reason makes it both. An Act of Love is the Power of Loving exerted freely: and when it is exerted, it is by its essence Good & Gracious to its object. It cannot be without its own pleasure: It cannot be an Act of Lov without being Good and Gracious."[52]

More briefly but also more densely paradoxical, is his following statement about the eternal nature of divine love:

> "It never, ever began: but because of this too it ever never endeth. It ever endeth; it never endeth: and for this very reason it ever began, because it never began."[53]

Paradox is what Traherne ultimately comes to whenever he touches on eternity and infinity, love and the human soul. It is one of Traherne's most inescapable qualities.

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[52] *L*. fol. 127v.

[53] Ibid.

Ronald McFarland sees Traherne's use of paradox as a kind of 'semantic gaming' with a serious aim since "The solution to the ambiguous indefiniteness of things is to be found in the paradoxical statement"[54].

For Day, paradox, like other features of Traherne's style, rises out of Traherne's mystical consciousness:

> "Traherne's writing, like the language of all mysticism is characteristically paradoxical, for the mystic consciousness is dialectical rather than logical or dualistic. Denying, as it were, logic, and frustrating logicians, professional and temperamental, paradox is a mode of expressing the miraculous."[55]

and is not so much an artistic choice as it is an inevitability:

> "His appositive, paradoxical style is inherent to, or grows out of, its mystical subject matter. There is indeed a vital and ineluctable connection between form and content, mode and meaning." [56]

Both McFarland and Day see paradox as in some sense expressing the inexpressible though whereas for MacFarland the inexpressible is 'ambiguous indefiniteness', for Day it is 'the miraculous'.

Colie asserts that "Traherne was among the last serious thinkers to value paradox". In fact his work relies on it. According to Colie, paradox is the delicate balance upon which the fulcrum of Traherne's thought rests[57]. Like Day, Colie also sees in Traherne's work

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[54] McFarland, "From Ambiguity to Paradox: Thomas Traherne's 'Things'', *Wascana Review*, 9(1974): 114-123. p119-120. McFarland's belief in the power of paradox to resolve something of Traherne's ambiguity is stated clearly in his closing words: " In his use of the word 'thing' Traherne begins with an ambiguity that pushes to the limits of vagueness, but he arrives at a paradox that resolves all problems encountered on the way."

[55] A.L.Clements, "On the Mode and Meaning ", *SP*, vol.61 (1964): 500-521. p. 501.

[56] Ibid. p. 508.

[57] Rosalie Colie. "Thomas Traherne and the Infinite: The Ethical Compromise" *HLQ* vol. 21 (1957): 69-82. p. 77.

an underlying sense of the unity of all things, and for her, this unity is fed by the collapse of distinctions which paradox achieves:

> "In paradox, form and content, subject and object are collapsed into one, in an ultimate insistence upon the unity of being. Thinking in terms of paradox, or thinking about paradox, one cannot rely upon conventional categories... One is forced to fuse categories."[58]

One is again reminded, here, of Stewart's thesis that in Traherne's language there is a breaking down of boundaries, an erosion of distinction. All of these critics agree that paradox is important in Traherne. Most of them see it, rightly, as a means of bringing together opposites; but in doing so they seem to miss the fact that this bringing together is not a union but a communion. Paradox implies no merging. Rather it insists on the separateness at the same time as the unity of the two opposites. This impossible tension is at the root of what I would say about Traherne and it is a point to which I will return in my final chapter. In his paradoxes, Traherne seeks to express not only the infinite and ineffable[59],but the fact that the infinite stands present in the immediate, that the ineffable is everywhere around us, the permeability of time and eternity in which felicity may be now and hereafter and in which the divine image may be recovered in the human soul.

To Dees' division of twentieth century criticism into two main veins one could add, as a third vein, or possibly a sub-division of the first, those whose studies seek to address the problems of clarifying authorship and sources. Most significant in number and range are the studies of Marks alluded to earlier. It was through her research that criticism began to

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[58] *Paradoxia,* p. 518.

[59] Such, broadly speaking, is the assertion of Day ["Naked Truth"] and Clements ["On the Mode and Meaning", *MP*]; Colie ["Thomas Traherne and the Infinite"., *Paradoxia*]; and tangentially in Harold Ridlon `["The Function of the 'Infant-Ey'"].

be aware of the extent of Traherne's massive borrowing from other writers and the variety of his sources. Thus Traherne the innocent became Traherne the scholar, a transition confirmed by the most recent findings of the Lambeth Manuscript which yield yet more names to the long list of source material. The authorship of the *Meditations on the Six Days of Creation*[60] has been debated. Although both Wade and Margoliouth had claimed it was Traherne's and one of his early works[61], the doubts about Traherne's authorship raised by Helen White in her *Metaphysical Poets* (1936) were not fully answered until Catherine Owen's 1961 study[62]. Where Owen emphasized parallels between the philosophical concepts of the *Six Days* and other of Traherne's known works, George Guffy (introduction to the Augustan Reprint Society edition, 1966) concentrated on the diction and imagery of the work in order to demonstrate conclusively that Traherne really was its author. Ten years after Owen, Lynn Sauls gave further evidence regarding the sources and dating of the *Six Days*[63]. Jordan's 1982 study

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[60] published 1717 by Nathaniel Spinckes as part one of his *Collection of Meditations and Devotions in Three Parts*.

[61] See Wade (p. 154) who suggests, from internal evidence, that the Hexameron was published between 1661-1667. See also Margoliouth, I:xvi. who supports Wade's assessment.

[62] Catherine Owen, "The Authorship of the 'Meditations on the Six Days of Creation' and the 'Meditations And Devotions on the Life of Christ'", *Modern Language Review* (hereafter *MLR*), 56 (1961): 1-12. Owen settles beyond reasonable doubt that the *Hexameron* is Traherne's but she leaves open the possibility that the *Life of Christ* may be the result of composite authorship. See also Helen White, *Metaphysical Poets*, New York:Macmillan, 1936.

[63] Sauls, "Traherne's Debt to Puente's *Meditations*", *Philological Quarterly*, 50 (1971): 161-174. Sauls' discovery is that Traherne relied heavily on Puente's *Meditations* in his *Thanksgivings*, *Hexameron* and *CYB*. There are also double borrowings between *CYB* and *MSD* from a number of sixteenth and seventeenth century devotional writers (Sauls pp. 163-164) which link these two works further. Sauls suggests the order of compostion as *Thanksgivings, MSD* and then *CYB*. Day, however, whilst noting the significance

redresses Spinckes' misattribution of *Daily Devotions* to Susannah Hopton[64]. More generally, Anne Ridler has corrected some wrong attributions[65] and Diane Drehere has located a source for some of Traherne's second *Century*[66].

One area of critical study to which Dees does not give specific attention is theology. There have been a number of twentieth century critics interested in Traherne's theology and their most frequently discussed theological theme seems to be the question of original sin. From Itrat Husssain's assertion that Traherne's child is 'free from the taint of original sin"[67] rises the recurring charge that Traherne is a Pelagian. Others contend that he is not. The debate can be followed in studies produced by William Marshall, Keith Salter, George Guffy and Patrick Grant[68] each arguing a particular angle, but most

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of Sauls' discoveries, suggests a new chronology: *CYB* (between April and November 1670), *MSD* (1670-71) and *Thanksgivings* (1671-1672). Day, *TT*, p. 55.

[64] Jordan, "Thomas Traherne and the Authorship of *Daily Devotions*", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 12 (1982): 218-225.

[65] See "Traherne: Some Wrong Attributions", *Review of English Studies,* 18 (1967):48-49. The attributions in question are uninitialled fragments from amongst several poems in Philip's Notebook (cf. Margoliouth II, 204) and several lines from "A Serious and Curious night-Meditation" (cf. Margoliouth II,209) also from Philip's Notebook.

[66] Diane Drehere, "Traherne's Second 'Century': A Source in Ficino", *N&Q* 224 (1979): 434-436. Dreher discusses the threefold nature of love as seen in both Traherne's love begetting, love begotten and love proceeding and in Ficino's threefold process of love.

[67] Itrat Husain, *The Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (London:1948) p. 270. Of course, many critics tend to skim over the whole issue of orthodoxy, judging Traherne's views as a kind of forgivable heterodoxy which is the predictable outcome of such an amiable disposition as his is. Such, broadly speaking, is the view of Marks, Martz, Seelig and of Margoliouth.

[68] William Marshall argues that whilst Traherne obviously rejected "the Calvinistic doctrine of total corruption... he seems to have accepted a moderate interpretation of the Doctrine of Original Sin". According to this moderate interpretation, both Adam and

from the Pelagian premise. Salter's accusation of Pelagianism is the strongest; Guffy's rebuttal of Salter is clear and confident, drawing on *Christian Ethicks* as a balance to the optimism of the *Centuries*[69], but it does not answer the central problem of the working out of atonement in Traherne. Only Patrick Grant seems to have shifted the argument into new territory with his introduction of the Irenaen notion of sin and the fall. In "Original Sin and the Fall of Man in Thomas Traherne", Grant notes Traherne's hitherto unrecognised indebtedness to Irenaeus[70] and shows how Traherne's theology shares both the strengths and weaknesses of this particular pre-Nicene father. Grant concludes that "it is confusing to discuss Traherne, as critics have consistently done, in terms of an orthodoxy which is Augustinian. The Pelagian heresy and scholastic discussion of 'states'

Traherne's 'child' are'corruptible' rather than'corrupt' ; the fall is individual and the individual a microcosm of the race. "Thomas Traherne and the Doctrine of Original Sin", *Modern Language Notes* (hereafter *MLN*), vol. 73, no. 3 (March 1958) p. 161-165. Keith Salter, on the other hand, sees Traherne as a Pelagian heretic whose theological and stylistic weaknesses render him neither a good poet nor a proper mystic. That Traherne is a Pelagian in whose work one sees no need of grace or redemption is asserted in "Traherne and a Romantic Heresy", *N&Q* vol. 200 (1955): 153-156.; and developed later in *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet* (London: Edward Arnold, 1964.) .

[69] George Guffy, "Thomas Traherne on Original Sin" *N&Q*, 212 (1967):98-100. Guffy's argument is a)that Salter caused Traherne to appear more unorthodox by quoting his statements in reverse order, thus altering the emphasis; b) that Salter's arguments are based soley on *C*, only a fraction of his literary output, which he likens to assessing Milton's theology on nothing but *Paradise Regained*; and c) that *CE* is full of Traherne's recognition of the need for both grace and redemption.

[70] Grant starts by linking the pre-Nicene fathers, particularly Irenaeus, with the Cambridge Platonists, then with Daille whom Traherne cites repeatedly in *RF* (p. 17, 31,134) and finally he links Irenaeus directly with Traherne in Traherne's "Advertisement to the Reader" of *RF* in which Traherne uses Irenaeus's measure against heretics as his own. The many similarities between Irenaeus and Traherne: the importance of choice, sin as a misuse of choice and as a mis-evaluation, the understanding of Adam as himself and all men, the identfication of Adam with Christ in the incarnation, redemption as a new childhood are noted and examples from a range of Traherne's sources are given. *Journal of English Literary History* (hereafter *JELH*), 38 (1971):40-61.

of human nature are foreign to the vision of Irenaeus, and are not helpful for explicating the position of Traherne who assumes an Irenaen type of theology."[71] Grant then uses modern theological defences of Irenaeus against the accusation of Pelagianism to defend Traherne from the same accusation. Grant's work seems to have settled the matter for theologians. Thirteen years later, Michael Ponsford, gives a Pelagian gloss to Traherne, but interestingly this appears in an article not so much concerned to argue Traherne's position in orthodoxy as it is to demonstrate Traherne's place as a Restoration poet infused with the seventeenth century's new anti-Augustinian Enlightenment[72].

Several important studies of Traherne's structure seek to trace, in the literature which preceded Traherne, and in the mystical tradition, patterns which may have influenced the shape of his Dobell poems and of the *Centuries*. Martz's *The Poetry of Meditation* outlined the influence that Christian patterns of prayer, particularly three and five-part Augustinian and Bonaventurian meditations, had on the structure of seventeenth century

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[71] Ibid. pp. 40-41.

[72] Michael Ponsford, "Traherne's Apostacy", *Durham University Journal* (hereafter *DUJ*), 76(June1984): 177-185. [Ponsford's approach here is similar to that in other articles in which he links Traherne's thought to some aspect of the seventeenth century in general. See, for example "Thomas Traherne, the New Jerusalem, and Seventeenth Century Millenarianism" *DUJ,* 87"2 (July 1995) 243-250. ; and "Milton and Traherne: A Shared Pun on Guilt'", *ELN,* 25 (1987):37-40.] It may be interesting to note that most recent studies which include in their sources the newer discoveries such as *SM* and *COH* tend to recognise the importance of sin in Traherne's thinking. See, for instance, Michael Suarez. "Against Satan, sin and death: Thomas Traherne and the 'inward work' of conversion", in *Reform and Counterreform Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther.* Berlin; Mouton de Gruye. 1994. p. 77-103; and Joan Webber, *TEI.*

poems[73]. Wallace carried this thesis further, showing how the Dobell folio was a five-part meditative exercise. Wallace's study lamented the tendency to read the Dobell folio as a series of unconnected poems, a fault which he felt had made Traherne "more idiosyncratic than he is"[74], and his study opened the way for the Dobell poems to be considered separately from the others in the Burney manuscript. But it was AL Clements who made reading the Dobell Folio as a sequence normative[75]. Clements was the first critic to develop the discussion of the Dobell folio as a "unified, coherent sequence of poems"[76]. His work moved away from understanding the Dobell poems in specifically Bonaventurian or Jesuitical terms, as Martz and Wallace had done respectively, and toward a reading which saw the poems as an account of the mystical journey of the soul. Subsequent studies by Sherrington[77] and others have seen Traherne's mysticism as having varying degrees of significance in the formation of his poetic voice. For

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[73] See: Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation.* New Haven: 1954.; *The Meditative Poem*. New York: New York University Press, 1963.; and *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964.

[74] Wallace, "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation", *JELH.* vol. 25.2(June1958):79-89. p. 89.

[75] Stewart also discussed division of the Dobell sequence and suggested four divisions. See also Ben Drake "Thomas Traherne's Songs of Innocence" , *Modern Language Quarterly*,31 (1970): 492-503 who sees each of Clements', Stewart's and Wallace's divisions as plausible and whose concern is that a reader may "take these tentative sections to define an aesthetic structure whose whole will much clarify any given poem".

[76] *MP,* p. 5. See also: Clements, A. L. "On the Mode and Meaning"; other more general but also valuable works by Clements are: "Thomas Traherne: A Chronological Bibliography", *The Library Chronicle*. 35:1,2 (1969): 36-51.; and *Poetry of Contemplation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

[77] Alison Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. St Lucia: Australia, 1970. See also Malcolm Day, *TT.*

Clements, Traherne's voice is an inevitable derivative of his mystical vision. Stewart, on the other hand, sees Traherne's 'additive', 'open' and 'expansive' language as initiating rather than derivative; its purpose is deliberately to erode the temporal boundaries of time and place so that the mystical vision may be seen[78]. Both Clements and Stewart try to explain his poetry in terms of a neo-platonic 'mystical vision', whereas Day traces the formation of Traherne's poetic voice in the Hebraic and Biblical patterns of repetition and parallel structure. Day's conclusion, that whilst there are moments in his poetry that work, Traherne was more often frustrated by his attempts to force his thought into the poetic structures he had inherited, seems, at first glance, similar to the original critique of the early twentieth century. But Day's analysis is patient where the early critics were impatient, and it is informed by the critique that had developed in the intervening years. Drawing on the insights of the likes of Martz, Clements and Stewart, Day concludes that, like most of us, Traherne's very strength is also his weakness. When he writes that the features most characteristic of Traherne's prose are "also the most potent forces shaping his poetry" and that those same features "are as much responsible for his failures... as they are responsible for his successes," [79] he does so in a tone of respect for Traherne's carefully evolved poetic voice and with a sense of regret that the poetic structures of the seventeenth century were not yet open enough to accommodate Traherne's particular vision.

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[78] see Stewart, *TEV,* p. 209-210.

[79] Day, *TT,* p. 154.

Seelig, on the other hand, is one of the few to suggest that the difference between the quality of his prose and of his verse "is not so great as was once supposed". She contends that much of the adverse critique of Traherne's poetry stems from the early failure to distinguish between the Dobell Folio and the Burney Manuscript[80] and from the continuing practice of judging the effectiveness of a single poem in isolation. Seelig sees both the *Centuries* and the poems as primarily cyclical and climactic, structured by the continual process of infinite extension and perpetual return[81].

The structure of the *Centuries* has been the subject of several studies. Martz saw the *Centuries* as based on a model of Augustinian and Bonaventurian meditation in which the soul progresses through three stages of discovery finding God in a) the temporal world b) the self, and finally c) in God's attributes.[82] Gerald Cox differed with Martz, seeing Traherne's structure as "contemporary rather than medieval" and "Platonic rather than

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[80] The Dobell Folio (Bod MS. Eng. Poet. c. 42) is an autograph manuscript containing 37 poems with numerous corrections by his brother Philip. The Burney Manuscript (British Museum MS Burney 392) compiled from 'lost' material, is written entirely in Philip's hand. 22 of the Burney poems are also found in Dobell, but there are 39 which do not appear in Dobell, although one, "On News", appears in *C*.III.26. Most of Philip's changes, apparently designed to 'correct' Thomas' meter and extravagant expression, are considered to have flattened his verse. (cf. Margoliouth: "Philip's arrangement of the poems is on the whole a good one; his editing and changing of the text is a disaster." intro. to volume I, xv). As a result, the current trend is to regard only the Dobell Folio as a fair measure of the poet's worth.

[81] Seelig. *Shadow of Eternity,* p. 109 ff. According to Seelig, the total effect of the *Centuries* and of the poems derives from the cumulative effect of these cycles which may be contained within a single meditation or poem or span several, consequently the effectiveness of his work can only be judged when the combined impact is considered.

[82] Martz, *Paradise Within*, p. 56-57.

Augustinian"[83]. Yet Cox uses the same three divisions of God, the World and the Self, albeit in different order, for the first three Centuries, before moving on to the fourth Century "communion with God' and the fifth 'God's attributes'. Unfortunately, Cox's conclusion, that as a Platonic devotion, the *Centuries* fail, is a conclusion which rather disproves his own premise[84]. Jordan's analysis of the structure of the *Centuries* is more innovative; he is the first to suggest that the shape of the *Centuries* is based on Traherne's three (or four) estates -- Innocency, Misery-Grace and Glory[85]. According to Jordan, "the *Centuries* are about the journey of the soul through these estates, teaching the reader how to expand his thought to include all."[86] . Interestingly, Jordan's 'all' divides into the

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[83] Gerald Cox III. "Traherne's *Centuries*: A Platonic Devotion of 'Divine Philosophy'", *Modern Philology,* 69(1971-72):10-24. p. 11.

[84] Cox describes the *Centuries* as "an interesting failure" (p. 24) the inevitable conclusion of a study which seeks to impose on Traherne's work a structure insufficient to the task. For, despite the many platonic connections in the *Centuries*, Neo-Platonism alone is not expansive enough to provide an explanation of the work's structure. This is what Cox himself inadvertently admits when he writes that "Traherne's prose devotion overwhelm[s] its Platonic structure." (p.23). If Traherne's work seems out of control, as Cox several times claims, perhaps the problem is that the model by which Cox understands the work is simply not big enough to contain it.

[85] The Estates may be four or three depending on whether one sees Misery and Grace as separate or combined. In *CE* (ch xiv,xxiii, xxiv) and in *KOG*, Traherne speaks of an Estate of Trial which is a state in which the soul experiences both affliction and virtue mixed, and this seems to blur the distinction between the estates of Misery and Grace. However, for Traherne being in the estate of Grace may mean a move away from abject misery, but it does not imply an absence of affliction. It is this very mixture that is seen as the working of grace -- grace is only grace when worked through difficulty. And so Misery and Grace are most correctly understood as two separate estates. Traherne makes this distinction clear when he writes in *CE* : "PATIENCE is a Vertue of the Third estate; it belongs not to the estate of Innocence, because in it there was no Affliction; nor to the estate of Misery, because in it there is no Vertue: but to the estate of Grace it appertains, because it is an estate of Reconciliation, and an estate of Trial: wherein Affliction and Vertue meet together. In the estate of Glory there is no Patience." (ch. xxiv).

[86] Jordan, *The Temple of Eternity: Thomas Traherne's Philosophy of Time.* Kennikat Press: London. 1972. p. 72. Chapters four onwards discuss the structure of the *Centuries*.

same three categories seen in both Martz and Cox -- God, the world and the self. Jordan writes: "Within the Centuries, the "all" is divided for consideration into three main parts: 'GOD, THE WORLD, YOUR SELF'."[87] That these three categories keep appearing is less surprising when one considers that they are categories Traherne himself establishes. In the Second Century he writes that all things are either one of these three things:

> "All which you have here. GOD, THE WORLD, YOUR SELF. *All Things* in Time and Eternity being the Objects of your Felicity GOD the Giver, and you the Receiver."[88]

Day notes this repetition of the three categories, but finds them unconvincing as structural divisions in the *Centuries*. As he points out, neither Martz, Cox, nor Jordan agree on where the divisions should be, and it is clear that Traherne discusses the three topics at various points throughout the work, not in distinct sections. Eventually Day concludes that the *Centuries* are "freely patterned, devotional paragraphs of varying lengths,"[89]

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[87] Ibid. p. 74.

[88] C. II. 100. This is the passage both Jordan and Day cite. It seems to me that Jordan and the others are missing the point here. The significance of what Traherne is saying lies in the relationship between the three categories. The distinctions are made useful only in so far as they provide the possibility of gift and receipt. In Traherne's economy of circulation there must always be this act of giving and so there must be three players -- Donor, Gift, Recipient. Hence God, the world and the self reappear continually, not as arbitrary distinctions, but as part of an ongoing dynamic of circulation. Here the donor is God, elsewhere the donor is man, giving back to God through love, through meditation, through various means, a re-created world of thought and desire. This is a subject to which I return in chapter 5.

[89] Day sees this style as being in the pattern of Joseph Hall (1575-1656). Hall wrote *The Art of Divine Meditation* (1606) and *Centuries of Meditations and Vows: Divine and Moral* (1605-1606). Day notes similarities between Hall's meditations and Traherne's noting, amongst other features, that Hall connected this form of meditation with David,'the divine psalmist'. This is a link upon which, interestingly, Day does not build, although repeatedly Traherne quotes the psalms in his work, particularly in the *Centuries*, composes psalmic 'resolves' in *Inducements to Retiredness*, and confesses that he longs to 'become what David was' (cf. *C.* III, 70-97). Previous to Day, but less conclusively, Barbara Lewalski had made a connection between Traherne and Hall in

which may be best understood as "a series of progressively deepening instructions in the proper enjoyment of the world"[90]. Stewart, on the other hand, saw the *Centuries*, as all of Traherne's work, in light of a rhetoric of erosion in which the apparent wanderings, repetition and hyperbole work together towards openness and the breaking down of boundaries. This may go some way to understanding Traherne's style, but hardly seems a strong enough framework for structure.

In terms of art, the *Centuries* have received particular treatment from Elizabeth Jennings and Allan Gilbert. Whilst Jennings sees his poems as 'lovely artefacts' which we may admire but in which we do not participate[91], the *Centuries* are Traherne at his most accessible. She sees them as clear and unmuddled, with a 'solid basis of thought beneath every flight of eloquence'[92], their order deriving not from Traherne's imposition of it, but from his concern to reveal the existing order of the natural world and of the divine human relationship. Gilbert, on the other hand, sees much artistry and skill in Traherne's poems. He believes the elaborate stanzas, catalogues and large scale figures (such as childhood,

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Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric. Princeton, 1979. Jordan also discusses Hall as a source for Traherne in "Thomas Traherne and the Art of Meditation", *Journal of the History of Ideas* (hereafter *JHI)*, 46:3(July-Sept 1985): 381-403.

[90] Day,TT, p. 106, 108.

[91] Jennings, "The Accessible Art: A Study of Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*", *The Twentieth Century,* 167(1960):140-151.

[92] Ibid. p. 143.

light, Eden) effectively liberate Traherne's thought to move freely where other poets' thoughts do not[93].

Over and over again, Traherne's style has been criticised for its lack of restraint, his thought for its lack of system, and yet, I would contend, Traherne's thought and work are more fully aware than such criticisms suggest. Day, in his 1982 study *Thomas Traherne*, believes that more recent criticism of Traherne is growing beyond, to quote (1934) Quiller-Couch, "an early tendency to see Traherne as a charming child who insisted upon singing his lovely but meaningless Neoplatonic songs"[94] towards an attitude of greater respect for the profundity which is becoming increasingly apparent in Traherne as increasing numbers of manuscripts reveal more of his thought.

Leigh DeNeef is one modern critic who has attempted to engage primarily with Traherne's thought rather than style. His ambitious work *Traherne in Dialogue* sets out to relocate Traherne intellectually by placing him in dialogue with Heidegger, Lacan and Derrida. His section on Traherne and Lacan tills the little worked but highly significant area of Object and other in Traherne throwing new light on the importance of *difference* and lack. In its insistence that in desiring the self finds its being, DeNeef's work connects with what Colie has called 'infinite aspiration' and what Webber suggests about the primacy of separation before unity. It also echoes what Bruce has written about

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[93] Alan Gilbert, "Thomas Traherne as Artist. Part Two", *MLQ*, 8(1974): 435-447.

[94] Day, *TT*, preface. Here he refers to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Felicities in Thomas Traherne*. (London: P,J, and A.E. Dobell, 1934.) as an example of such early criticism.

the importance of desire as an agent of felicity[95], although, in his discussion of desire, DeNeef addresses the process more thoroughly than the end.

There is a common theme running under what many of these latter twentieth century critics have had to say about Traherne's poetic. It is basically that we have too-readily dismissed him; and the force of their argument seems to be confirmed by the gradual unfolding of new manuscripts which, although they have not yet made radical departures from the previously known themes and sources, have nevertheless added new material for consideration. *Select Meditations*, identified at Yale by Osborn in 1964 gave us a new 'early work' believed to have been written by Traherne in his twenties[96] in which his theological/devotional themes jostle with political and autobiographical details as he struggles with his own vocation in a politically and ecclesiastically charged time. It is both a deeply private and very public work -- private in the extensive self-examination of his spiritual reflection, which is distinctly more aware of the problem of sin than, for

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[95] Donald Bruce "Thomas Traherne, 1637-1674" *Contemporary Review*. 226 (1975): 19-24. For Bruce, where desire is the wound, felicity is the easement. Since by desire the will is kept in motion and the mind prevented from becoming static, desire is its own cure.

[96] See p. xii of Julia Smith's introduction "Many references to the political situation in England seem to date its composition (though not necessarily the manuscript copy) shortly after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. The king had clearly returned, as we see from prayers such as 'Soften our Kings Heart, Teach our Senators Wisdom' (*SM*. I. 8.), but the memory of turmoils which preceded the Restoration is fresh, and Traherne's anxiety about the precarious settlement of the national church and the 'Disobedient Hereticks'(*SM*. III.23), the Protestant nonconformists who opposed it, suggests a date not long after 1660." The reference 'As long as our nation continueth in peace' (I. 86) may refer to the approaching war on the Dutch which was declared in March 1665. Smith sees a less assured style and command of language, which suggests that Traherne may have still been developing his poetic voice.

example, the *Centuries*[97]; and public in his political/ecclesiastical concerns which, recurring frequently as they do, remind us that his public considerations are never far from his thought. As Matar notes "all his writings testify to his concern with national affairs."[98].

Commentaries of Heaven, announced in the *TLS* in 1982[99], with its 400 double column pages of Traherne's tiny writing, 94 poems and over 4,000 lines of verse, gave us a 'late work', possibly still being written in the year before his death[100]. As an intended huge dictionary of Traherne's thought, it ranges widely covering most of his themes[101] and showing how they relate to each other, even though the work only goes as far as the letter 'B'. It is a departure in form from his previous meditations, treatise, or polemic; but its

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[97] Traherne's concern with sin in the *SM* is a concern about both private and public sin. Just two of many examples of private confession are: "And Since my Baptisme, and Since my Repentance I have Grieveously Sinned." (I. 34) and the even more passionate "As a prisoner returning from the pitt, as a Malefactor Saved from the cross, yea as a Devill taken out of Hell, I return O Lord to the Glory of thy Kingdom. For my crime hath been wors then Satans." (II. 36). And of the sins of humanity and of his particular parishioners he writes: "Gods Eternite is a Bottle like the Heavens Wherein the Tears of Penitents Glitter like the Stars;" (I.93) "Tho they have been and are Rebellious against Thee and will be, yet let me Continually Intercede for them" (I.84).

[98] "Prophetic Traherne: 'A Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Nation'", p. 16.

[99] Rose, "A New Traherne Manuscript", *TLS*. March 19, 1982. 324.

[100] Traherne refers to the death of Christ as having happened "1640 years ago" so, assuming that Traherne believed that Christ was thirty-three at the time of the crucifixion, the date of the manuscript would be 1673. This date would also correspond with the publication dates of other works Traherne has cited in the manuscript. For further details see Richard Jordan, "The New Traherne Manuscript "Commentaries of Heaven'", *Quadrant*, 27 (August 1983): 73-76.

[101] The title page refers to *Commentaries* as a work on Felicitie, and the content of the entries ranges from the themes of childhood, to infinity and Eternity, 'affections', and the great capacity of the human soul. In entries such as 'Ant' and 'atom' we see the usual interest in the new sciences.

themes are familiar. What it offers is a chance to explore individual ideas in greater detail.

The full impact of the newest discoveries, the Lambeth Manuscript, and "The Ceremonial Law", have yet to be revealed. Already the five prose works of the Lambeth Manuscript[102] have thrown further and more specific light onto Traherne's position in the Calvinist/Arminian debate, given us reflections concerning the life of retirement away from the world which are new insights into his spiritual life, added two new shorter essays or 'themes', and provided a new substantial treatise, in *The Kingdom of God* which, like *Commentaries*, combines prose exposition with poetry, reiterates Traherne's themes, and treats those themes in detail. One of the new things the Lambeth Manuscript offers is further development of his idea of the soul as bride which appears in *Select Meditations*.

What all of this means for the critique of Traherne's work is that the critique must stay as open as the canon. New works challenge and alter our understanding, the emphasis may shift, earlier statements may be qualified. In this climate, his great theme 'Felicitie' cannot be read simplistically, or finally.

As we have seen, there grew up, very early in the critique of Traherne, the "Poet of Felicity", a notion that Traherne was in touch with neither the practical realities of everyday human life, nor the heavier spiritual 'realities' of sin and its effects. Towers, for instance, whilst finding Traherne "brimming with happiness", considered him so pure

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[102] For a fuller description of the Lambeth Manuscript see Inge and Macfarlane, "Seeds of Eternity: the New Traherne Manuscript", *TLS.*, 2 June 2000, p. 14.

and rare that he couldn't face the facts of life and was therefore ultimately impotent to impart his joy[103]. According to this reading, what he does see of the world is nature in a kind of glorified state. Such lines as the famous, "The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown."[104] from the third *Century*, are the flagships of such a reading. In this view, he is often thought of in Romantic terms, linked with Blake and Wordsworth and Walt Whitman[105], and his 'felicity' is a kind of innocence revisited. As Dobell's "happy soul" and Wade's "radiant, happy mortal"[106], he is charming but infantile, a pretty Traherne whose sentiment could never quite match reality. And Traherne's great theme, which he intended should thrill and inspire, becomes a felicity which is alienating and over simplistic. Marks voiced the frustration of many readers when she wrote concerning 'communication', that full expression of Traherne's Felicity:

> "There is a certain naivete about all this; it is too simple. All we need do is love 'Simple Naked Souls,' recognize the true worth of things, and all will be well....In the end, that simplicity diminishes our faith in Traherne's sincere but facile professions of practicality. His conviction of man's goodness can inspire us to admiration, perhaps to envy, but not to assent.

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[103] Francis Towers, "Thomas Traherne: His Outlook on Life", p 1027.

[104] *C.* III. 3. Here and hereafter the Ridler version of the *Centuries* is used.

[105] Such connections are made in, amongst others, Dobell (introduction) and Wade(p148) and in Elbert Thompson, "The Philosophy of Thomas Traherne" *Philological Quarterly,* viii:2(1929):97-112.; Drake, "Thomas Traherne's Songs of Innocence", *MLQ*, 31(1970): 492-503.; Alan Bradford's *Preface* to the 1991 Penguin paberback selection; and Dorothy Sayers, "The Beatrician Vision in Dante and other Poets", *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 2 (1958): 3-23; though Sayers also notes some important distinctions between Traherne and Wordsworth..

[106] "He became one of the most radiantly, most infectiously happy mortals this earth has known.". Wade, p. 3.

> ...however much we long to believe, Traherne's strong and loving faith is for us but a dream."[107]

Her frustration is not unreasonable; felicity and faith are so linked in Traherne, that it is hard to appreciate the first without some connection to the latter. If not from his faith then whence does his felicity spring? Critics have traced roots of his felicity in his theology, psychology and philosophy and yet have, by and large, managed to convey a Traherne who, in spite of these roots, is not quite human. He either has a mystical vision or an unusually clear memory of childhood experiences or a philosophical system that we do not. And so his felicity remains isolating. As DeNeef puts it, "there is little sense [in collected criticism] that Traherne ever suffered from the kinds of alienation that besiege either his own contemporaries or his subsequent readers."[108]

There seem to me to be several flaws in these readings of Traherne's felicity that need to be addressed. One is that his felicity is easy, another is that it is complete, a third is that it is an abstraction. That his felicity is easy may be a misapprehension rising from his own phrases such as 'easy unstained felicity' and "all mine and seen so easily"[109] although few would want to read these in isolation. The relatively limited number of works available to early critics may be another factor in the emergence of the 'easy felicity' ideal. More recent discoveries have certainly given a different gloss to

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[107] Marks, "Traherne's Church's Year-Book" . p. 71-72. See Day's response to this criticism in *TT*, p.5.

[108] DeNeef, *TID*, p. 5-6.

[109] 'Designe'. l. 55. A brief comparison between the words 'easy' and 'ease' is revealing. Whereas 'easy', 'easiest' and 'easily' appear fourteen times in the Dobell and Burney manuscripts, there are eighteen instances of Traherne begging for 'ease' of one distress or another. See Guffy's *Concordance* pp. 122-123.

Traherne's struggles[110], and where some critics, such as Douglas Bush, acknowledge Traherne's personal struggle to find felicity but fail to see that struggle conveyed in his ecstatic writing[111], it may be because the ecstatic moments of his writing are where the triumph rather than the struggle are recorded. The notion of 'easy felicity' may also be a result of his felicity being so often viewed as an achieved state, or, as Stewart describes it, "an accomplished fact of the speaker's existence."[112]. This past perspective of the struggle towards felicity makes Traherne's happiness seem toil free -- what was at the time an arduous search becomes in retrospect an act of enjoyment [113]. One can see how such a reading could arise since Traherne claims so often to have found felicity. It is his absolute conviction that felicity is the infant soul's home that may, 'by highest reason' be found again. It is both the starting point and the end, and as such it may appear that the soul journeys not at all. To read Traherne's felicity as if felicity is a kind of enjoyment

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[110] As Webber notes "No reader of the *Select Meditations* could ever conceive of calling this author a 'poet of felicity'." *TEI,* p. 225.

[111] "Whatever spiritual trials Traherne had gone through before he had won felicity, in his ecstatic writings he seems to be far removed from the inward struggles" of the other metsphysical poets. Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*, p. 157.

[112] Stewart p. 64. Wade also saw Traherne as having achieved felicity. The struggle was past, the pearl was already won and Traherne was infectiously and radiantly happy. (Wade, p. 3.)

[113] Such is the view of Francis King, "Thomas Traherne:Intellect and Felicity" in *Restoration Literature Critical Approaches,* Methuen and Co:London, 1972. p. 121-143. His premise is that the attained state of Traherne's felicity gives him a different starting point and allows him sloppy thought and language. He does, however see felicity as something hard won. " the activity of felicity is an intense and learned activity, rather than pure Act...the conceptual thought working on living memory... it is this conjunction that radiates felicity, not the flaccid exclamations about Glory, Love, Light, Space, which seem a betrayal of the act of 'Life'(p129).

without labour, a coming home without the journey is to cut it off from its roots. Not surprisingly, in such a reading, it withers.

Another reading of Traherne's felicity which severs it from its roots is the reading which sees felicity as either a kind of vague optimism or an abstraction. Justin Miller rejects optimism as another name for felicity. He contends that "The full meaning of 'felicity' cannot be appreciated without viewing it in the context of Traherne's empathy for the pain of the Crucifixion...The greatness of Traherne's spirit is not in its amiable optimism but in his continued appreciation for the transcended creaturedly and created."[114]. Day takes Traherne's optimism seriously; it comes from somewhere and is going somewhere, since it arises out of a 'cosmic' perspective which sees all temporal events in the light of eternity[115]. However, for most critics 'optimism' means not much more than 'cheerful but weak'. As Bush writes: "Neither as a Christian nor as philosopher does Traherne seem quite mature;" in his work there is "a large element of facile, expansive, emotional optimism, the kind of optimism which in the next generations passed easily into deistic sentimentalism and vague aspiration towards infinity."[116] In such a view, 'enjoyment' is simply rejoicing in the natural beauty of the world, and felicity is the abstract title given

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[114] Justin Miller. "Thomas Traherne: Love and Pain in the Poet of Felicity" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church.* 49 (1980): 209-220. pp. 210 and 220. Miller argues that Traherne's leading the reader into participation in the life of the Divine must include this suffering He holds that Traherne's unique gift is that by appreciation and purgation,he transcends the material world without ever losing his gratitude for it. See also Itrat-Husain whose understanding of felicity similarly relies on apprehending the significance of the cross. (*The Metaphysical Element*...p. 294).

[115] Day, *TT* p. 5.

[116] Bush, op cit. p 158.

to this activity. Certainly, abstraction is what Willis Barnestone thinks Traherne is about. For him Traherne's characteristic hyperboles and paradoxes are a kind of 'poetic cubism' in which felicity is not about realism. Barnestone's felicity is an ecstacy of the abstract in which it is reality rather than realism that the poet seeks. Although he notes the presence of desire and aspiration, in the end, simply waking to one's own fullness brings "easy unstained felicity" [117].

This simple waking to what I would term 'right sight' is certainly an important feature of Traherne's felicity. But he did not, and we cannot, bypass the process that enables that vision. Felicity is not simply enjoying the world where we understand enjoyment to be free of the weight of need. It is not easy or abstract or finished. Rather, Traherne's felicity is a perpetual experience of refreshed desire. Enjoying the world is one movement towards this, but felicity itself is more profound. It is about having the continuous want of love and goodness continually supplied.[118]

It seems strange to me that, as the critique of Traherne's work has evolved in the twentieth century, so much has been written on the enjoyment of Felicity whilst so little work has been done on the process that leads to that enjoyment, what shapes and drives

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[117] Barnestone, "Two Poets of Felicity; Thomas Traherne and Jorge Guillen", *Books Abroad*. 42(1968): 14-19. see particularly p. 17-19. Barnestones' emphasis on abstraction goes so far that he asserts of the two poets: "their mode of perception makes the poem a form of literary cubism.". It seems to me that Barnestone's felicity seeks to go beyond the world without ever having gone through it. In failing to recognise the sacramental nature of Traherne's vision, he has misunderstood Traherne's relationship to the world.

[118] T.O. Beachcroft noted this as early as 1930: "This rarefied rejoicing in natural beauty is apt to be represented as the whole burden of Traherne's Felicity: in truth it is but the first movement towards it." in "Traherne and the Doctrine of Felicity," *The Criterion* 9(1930): 291-307. Where Beachcroft deals with the theme of felicity his study is at its most valuable. His broader comments on Traherne's style and structure are, in the light of subsequent discoveries, less accurate.

it, what makes it possible. We have largely neglected felicity's darker side, the lacks and wants by which we know our needs and in which we move, and which give felicity its shadow. Without this shadow our depictions of felicity remain unrounded and unrooted, circles rather than spheres, routes without origins.

Chapter 2: Desire

Desire and Sexuality:

What exactly do I mean by desire in Traherne? The word 'want' with both its positive implication of stretching outward toward an object and its negative connotation of lack is a near synonym. But want is a word easily misunderstood. In our sex-conscious age it is a word that needs some clarification, since not only is sex about wanting, but also wanting is evidently now about sex. A great deal of contemporary advertising tells us this -- that sex sells. It sells everything from novels to three piece suites[119]. If we make something sexy people will want it. And so sexual desire as well as being an expression of our want has become a catalyst to it. And terms like desire and want are difficult to read in an unsexualized light.

Until recently there has been so little sex in Traherne that discussing desire in terms of sexuality has not been an issue for Traherne scholars. There is certainly sensual imagery in the *Centuries* and *Commentaries of Heaven*, imagery of tasting and feasting and having and seizing with passion[120]. But these references, though sensual, and whilst perhaps allusively sexual, are not explicitly so. Two works in the Lambeth Manuscript,

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[119] Witness anything from the cover of Jilly Cooper to a recent DFS furniture catalogue in which headings read "how to fake it" (photo of alluring woman in low cut animal skin print lounging seductivley on leopard skin couch), "legs are in" (photo of curvy legs peeking from opened bathrobe) and "feel me" (beautiful woman lounging luxuriantly on couch with ogling man standing above her).

[120] For example "Affection" (COH) ; *C*.I. 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 38, 44, 63,; *C*. II. 2, 7-8., 66-68.; *C*. III.3., *SM*. II. 95-97.; "Desire", "Solitude"(in which the poet suffers from lack of these joys); "Another" (in which the thirst is God's).

however, move these sensual allusions into a more sexual setting -- the bride and her bridegroom, the lover and the beloved.

In the last half of *The Kingdom of God*, there is a passage in which we see the bride/soul image developed more highly than anywhere else in all of Traherne's work[121]. The passage is some four folios in length and is given entirely to outlining the role of the bride and of the bridegroom, the reasons for their joy and the risks of their love. On the second folio we find a certain amount of sexual suggestion when the soul is described as the untouched virgin whose divine bridegroom is gratified with the greater pleasure because of the freshness of her experiences as he approaches.

> "And as there are pleasures peculiar to the Estate of Woers, and perhaps sweeter than those of marriage, but wholly different; so was she placed in the estate of Trial, as a virgin untouched, that she might experience all the Approaches of so Beautiful a Suitor, and Gratifie his Affection with the Greater Pleasure."[122]

These euphemistic lines are few in the whole of the passage. What is more significant, to my mind, is the tension that runs throughout. Will she receive his approaches? Will satisfaction be attained? Will she conceive what he begets?[123] The passage as a whole

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[121] The image of the Divine Lover and the Soul/Bride is scattered throughout Traherne's work. See: "O remember how all Thy Lov Terminates in me: How I am made thy Bride," (*SM*.I.82); "I am made His Bride to Delight Him." (*SM* II.5.); also *SM*. I. 83.; II. 16-18.; II.23.: II.40.; II.66.; and *C*.V.10.; as well poems such as "Adultery" (COH p. 33). But most metaphors are not expanded beyond a few lines. In *ITR* (10v) a slightly longer passage on the soul as bride occurs, but its concern is to depict the honors conferred on God's bride rather than the joys of wooing and winning. In several places in *KOG*, the soul/Bride image is developed more fully to convey a) the force of God's jealousy (*KOG* 164r-167v) and b)God's joy in giving to us (*KOG* 199v-201r).

[122] *KOG*. 365r.

[123] These questions are posed by such lines as: " O what fear and compassion! what Expectation and Desire! what Agonie, what Weakness, Danger... But O what unspeakable Joy!... when all the Danger is over, and the satisfaction attained," (365r) and by that cited in the text above. The word 'danger' itself appears no less than four times and is suggested many times over.

participates in the sexual dynamic of power, consent and union, and these three themes reverberate repeatedly over the several pages. The specifically sexual lines cited above are the metaphor distilled, sexual consummation expressing the consummation of their whole life in union and communion with each other. Traherne makes it clear from the outset that this passage is about God and the soul[124], whereas in his short treatise *Love*, also from the Lambeth Manuscript, he begins with an extended description of love that is purely human.

In this second passage, the language is more physical: there are caresses and embraces, the beloved surrendering herself up to be devoured by the love of her lover whose glances, sighs and touches ravish her more than anything in the world. Because works from the Lambeth Manuscript are not yet readily available, I have quoted here at length:

> "It is a prodigious thing to contemplate the illimited sweetness of Tyrannical Love. Even here upon Earth it hath been seen somtimes so transcendent and endless, that a Majestie admired and adored by others, a Beauty scarce permitted to be seen afar off, desired by thousands, but by none to be familiarly approached not to be spoken to by the greatest Kings but upon the Knee, nor accosted but with Trembling, hath surrendered up it self to be devoured by the Love of one, and as greedily desired his Embraces as prodigaly bestowed her own. As if they were somthing more then celestial, a favorable Glance, a Sigh, a Touch, are able to enflame a loving Soul with Raptures, and inspire Delights which no Ravishments in the World can equal. All the Conversation is Extasie, feasts, Banquets, Victories, Triumphs, Crowns, Scepters, Jewels, Perfumes, Elixars, Spices, Treasures, Palaces, Temples, Pictures, Caresses, Songs, Musick, whatever can be thought of; all are nothing, compared to the Conversation the Lov and the Beauty of such a particular Person. What is the reason of all this high and Strange Esteem? It is Lov alone. This Lovly Empress hath conceived an Affection in her soul to such a person: and the most high and worthy souls are capable of the most high and violent Affections. This makes her Object so happy and glorious in the Conquest of such a rare and invincible Potentate. And in all this the Communicativ Humor of his Love is delighted. But this is not all. As He is more Enjoyable here then in other places, he has more to enjoy. His Eys are the Sun that enlighten her Soul, his Face is the Abridgment of heaven in her Esteem, his Arms the circle of felicitie, his Breath more Sweet then Arabian Airs, his soul a mysterious Abyss of Glory, his Accents more delightfull then the Musick of the Spheres, his existence the Lustre of the World, and his person more pleaseing then the same: She livs only for his sake, he is the

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[124] God is the bridegroom and the soul is the bride. folio 364v begins: "But this is not all. His Bride must hav som thing peculiar to her sex, which God himself doth not Enjoy unless it be in her:"

> only Life of all her Comforts, the Soul nay the very idol of her Soul. Thus it happeneth often in profane Loves. But (as we said) this is not all. There is an Avaricious humor likwise in Lov that desires to be satisfied: and to this she yeelds up herself a willing Sacrifice. He passeth through all her Guards, is reverenced by her Nobles, enters her Closet, ransacks her Letters, Treasures, Jewels; ascends her Throne, playes with her Scepter, invades her Crown, reigns in her Kingdom; enjoys all her Gardens, Palaces, Revenues, nay her Beauties, Desires, Affections. Her Arms, her Heart is open to him; and all these are esteemed only delightfull and glorious for his sake, because he alone is the truly Beloved, the Idol of her Soul, and her very soul. Were she able to do millions of things more for him, she would: her very Eys and hands are his, as well as her Jewels."[125]

There is a sense here that real bodies are being referred to -- there are arms and eyes, faces and breath to Traherne's lovers. There is greed in their embraces and prodigality in the bestowal of their favours. "There is an Avaricious humor" in their love that desires to be satisfied. Traherne stops just short of taking his reader into their bed. In fact, initially he did exactly that and thought the better of it, since he edited out 'her Bed' from the list of what was open to the lover: "Her Arms, her Heart, is open to him"[126]. Similarly, a few lines later, 'Lips' were edited out, though hands and eyes remain to be given to the lover along with her jewels[127]. What he did not see the need to reduce was his description of the taking of her power, or one might say, the giving up of her power, since "she yeelds up herself a willing sacrifice" to the one who passes through her Guards, is reverenced by her Nobles, etc. The fact of this taking remains total despite Traherne's removal of two 'all's ('all her Letters' and 'all her Beauties'). The lover is unchecked as he passes through her several layers of protection and privacy to the very highest symbols of her power: her throne, sceptre and crown. These he "ascends", "playes with" and "invades".

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[125] *L.* 126r-126v.

[126] This initially read "Her Arms, her Bed, her Heart, is open to him;" (126v)

[127] "& Lips" was edited from "her very Eys and Hands &Lips are his, as well as her Jewels." (Ibid)

His actions are the actions of conquest, described in language of sexual allusion both playful and violent.[128] The explicit sexuality Traherne has earlier edited out he has re-integrated metaphorically, and he has re-integrated it into that part of the account of their love which deals with the taking of and the relinquishing of power. Again the themes of power, consent and union, which appeared in the passage from *Kingdom of God* above, resurface; this time with even greater force. Where, in the *Kingdom of God,* the beloved is initially a Queen, here she is Tyrant, Empress and Potentate. In neither account is it fitting that she should be compelled; in both accounts the power she has to deny the lover heightens the pleasure of their union.[129]

In both the soul/bride metaphor of *The Kingdom of God* and the account of human love in *Love*, Traherne shows himself to be at home in the metaphors of earthly love, and we may see that he has some knowledge of the dynamic of sexual desire. Yet in neither of these accounts is sexual desire his primary concern. It may be the metaphor, but it is not the purpose. Always his purpose is to show the desire that exists in God for the human soul and in the human soul for God. And so it is not surprising that, in *Love*, he shifts attention from the human lover to the divine:

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[128] In these few lines the lover is also said to "enter", "ransack", and "enjoy".

[129] compare *KOG* (365r) "neither befits it the Estate of a queen to be compeld... What Praise, what Blessedness... when the satisfaction attained" ; with *L.* (126v) "and the most high and worthy souls are capable of the most high and violent Affections. This makes her Object so happy and glorious in the Conquest of such a rare and invincible Potentate."

> "... Let us ascend from temporal to Eternall Loves. If these Petite and finit Lovers can be thus ardent, and by meer Instinct understand their Interest: ...what may we think of God Almighty? By how much the more he loves, by so much the more doth he exceed in all."[130]

These two examples of sexual imagery are rare in the canon. More often than not Traherne, whilst freely using sensual images of feasting and treasure, seems to remain largely uninterested in specifically sexual imagery. And yet we may learn from the Lambeth Manuscript that Traherne's notion of desire does not ignore or avoid the sexual element which is part of desire. Rather, I believe, his notion of desire transcends sexuality, not sublimating it, but at once including and superceding it, as he "ascend[s] from temporal to Eternal Loves"[131]. The greatest loves are soul to soul, God to soul, and soul to God, for which all other binding loves serve as pictures. Thus his poem entitled "Adultery" is not about a husband and wife but about the soul's infidelity to God[132]. Similarly, in the *Centuries*, he admonishes his reader to see the beauty of the "Curious and fair Woman"[133] and to see moreover, that her greatest beauty is the image of God which she carries within her, that spark of the divine which makes her both wholly

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[130] *L.* 126v-127r. Similar parallels are also made in *KOG* when, in his discussion of adultery of the soul/Bride Traherne writes: "And by how much that more great and ardent Lov is, by so much that most is it grieved, if not chafed and enraged at the loss of its Object." (*KOG.* 165r). Again, in a passage on the soul/Bride which clearly echoes the Pauline model of husband and wife as Christ and the church, Traherne reitereates: "These [examples of earthly love] are Litle Hints of Infinit Mysteries" (*KOG.* 199v-200r).

[131] It is because only infinite things can be loved with infinite passion that he must ascend from the temporal. Traherne's desire is always seeking an equal object. See section 3 of this chapter.

[132] *COH.* 28. Similarly, in his discussion of infidelity in *KOG* (164v-165r), the most terrible aspect is not the violation of the body but of the relationship between the husband and the wife who represent the soul and God. "The injury consists not so much in defiling the Body, as in Adulterating the Mind."

[133] *C.* II 68.

human and tinged with heaven. He specifically does not say that to love the physicality of her is wrong, only that it is too little. They that love her eyes and hair and breasts and cheeks love too little, not too much.

The Passion Imperative:

What are we then to say about excessive love in Traherne's understanding of desire? Can there be such a thing as excess in love for Traherne? It seems that over and over again in Traherne excesses of love and desire are praised. In the *Centuries* Traherne writes of love: "Lov is infinitly Delightfull to its Object, and the more Violent the more glorious. It is infinitly High, Nothing can hurt it. And infinitly Great in all Extremes: of Beauty and Excellency. Excess is its true Moderation: Activity its Rest: and burning Fervency its only Refreshment."[134] In his Poem "Affection" (*COH.* 31), a poem of 137 lines devoted entirely to the praise of the affections of the soul, the reader is reminded that the whole purpose of creation is love. The world is made by Love out of love. Love, by several names, is presented as not only the cause and end of creation but also that which sustains and redeems it:

> "The World was made, he gave us glorious Laws,
> He made his Image: for what Glorious Cause?
> What was the Cause that moved him to make?
> What was the End for whose most Glorious sake?
> Why doth he still support and beautify
> Enrich the Earth and rule the Spacious Skie?
> What moves him to come down, to send his Son
> To furnish Heaven with Joys, as he hath done?
> *His Love, His Great Affection is the Cause.*" [135]

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[134] *C.*II.54.

[135] "Affection" ll. 32-40. (italics mine)

Having been made by Love out of love, Traherne's world is the place where love is to be sought and found. And this seeking is not only human; for God, too, is loving and seeking to be loved. "how much he thee doth prize"[136], writes Traherne, "All his Endeavors sanctified by Love/ Do with his Passions thy Enjoyments prove."[137]. Here we see not only a God whose love abounds in a generously charitable sense, but a God who loves as we love, a God who woos, whose passion dictates his action. This is a departure from the traditional image of God found in Christian theologians like Aquinas and the long line of those who have followed in the Thomist tradition. For Thomas writes,

> "When love, joy, and the like, are attributed to God or the angels or man's intellectual orexis, they refer simply to acts of will which produce indeed the same sort of result as does action prompted by emotion, but are not in fact accompanied by emotion."[138]

In other words, neither the human mind nor God nor the angels feel emotion when they act; we merely apply to them the terms for various emotions because we recognise the actions they perform as being like those we perform out of emotion. As Augustine writes,

> "The holy angels feel no emotion of anger when they inflict punishment, and feel no emotion of pity when they render help. But ordinary usage applies to them the terms for the various emotions because the actions which an angel performs are similar to those prompted in us by the emotions, although he himself is not subject to the weakness of those emotions."[139]

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[136] Ibid. l. 70.

[137] Ibid. l. 72-73.

[138] Ia2ae. 22. 3.

[139] *De civitate Dei* IX, 5. PL 41, 261.

This is the logical conclusion of a hierarchical system which places the mind above the body and then seats the emotions in that body. Emotion can be nothing other than weakness.

In terms of excessive love, Traherne's God is far removed from the Thomist model. His is a God whose passion is not a projection of our own human emotion, but whose emotion is the original stuff out of which our soul's capacity for passion is formed. For Traherne, God is love and we love in God's image."You must Want like a GOD, that you may be Satisfied like GOD", he writes, and "He made us Want like GODS"[140]. We understand divine love in human terms because the pattern of divine love is in us. So it should be no surprise that Traherne's divine lover loves in a fashion we recognise. He seeks to please; he sacrifices for and woos his beloved object. He offers Treasures, delights and bliss; he is singleminded, seeking nothing but the return of his love: "pure Love/ Aspires to nothing els, for nought doth move/ But this, to be Beloved"[141]. And he is not immune from the anguish of loving. This aspect of divine love is so shocking to Traherne that he interjects "My God!" into his poem at the very thought. It is at once

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[140] *C*.I.44., *C*.I.41.The indefinite article in "You must Want like a GOD" and the plural in "He made us Want like GODS" may raise some question concerning what kind of God Traherne is meaning. Is this 'god' *any* or *some various* gods, a notional deity, a pagan god? Clearly not, since in the very sentence following "He made us Want like GODS," Traherne goes on to distinguish between "the Heathen DIEIES" who "wanted nothing, and were therfore unhappy; For they had no Being" and "the LORD GOD of Israel the Living and True GOD... from all Eternity". For Traherne, the God of our 'wanting' is clearly understood in the monotheistic tradition of a Judeao-Christian God.

[141] "Affection". ll. 56-58.

terrible and wonderful to imagine God in anguish for the love of one human soul, and this is exactly what Traherne dares do:

> "He woes, he grievs, he Fears, he doth lament
> He hopes he covets and is discontent
> My God! what are we that thou so shouldst strive
> To retriev Mortals, "[142]

Moderation and decorum, elegance and poise are not the silks of this God's courtship. There is nothing classical[143] or courtly in Traherne's picture of God. Every word in the universe is his, whose only eloquence is ardor. For Traherne's God is a passionate God whose desire for the human soul is beautified by its own excess.

> "Sweetness and Ardor, Zeal and Violence,
> Excess of Lov, joynd with an Excellence
> So great, might justly ravish and Enflame
> Us,"[144]

Far from being revolted, Traherne says we are just to be ravished by this excessive display of divine passion. It is not surprising then that the appropriate response in the human heart is utterly unbridled. We are to burn with the same kind of longing and adoration, and should not expect to escape the pain of love.

> "Prize, burn with Love, Prais, laud, Admire.
> Contemplat, ravishd be, greiv striv desire

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[142] Ibid. ll. 104-106.

[143] Compare Traherne's picture of God with, for example, Aristotle's notion of virtue as lying in the mean. "So virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in the mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it. It is a mean betwen two kinds of vice, one of excess and the other of deficiency;" *NE.* 1107a1. 1-5. (pp. 101-102 in the Thomson translation).

[144] "Affection". ll. 96-99.

All Passions and Affections exercise
And scatter odours all the Way, as thou dost rise."[145]

This excessive emotion, far from barring us from the virtuous life, perfumes the air as we rise toward the divine. God's passion and our reciprocal love are that for which the world was made, according to Traherne:

"The World was made to be a Scene of Love,
And all the Earth a Theatre doth prove
Of those Affections, which we ought like Wise
Obliged and Holy men to exercise."[146]

The 'wise, obliged and holy men' sound lost in this poem, like ancient thoughtful sages observing the excesses of youth. Sandwiched as they are between Traherne's preceding rash claim "Lov sanctifies all Passions:"[147] and his description of an ardent God, their presence invites a fresh reading of 'wisdom'. Could Traherne be suggesting that there is a wisdom in excess? As Traherne approaches the end of the poem, the beauty of passion sanctified by love is reiterated in unequivocal terms:

"...Desire
Hope, Covet, Languish, flie, persue, admire
Open thy chaste extended Armes, prepare
Thy Heart with Jealousy and Zeal and Care
Love like a Spring doth all the Passions move
And that which sanctifies them all is Love."[148]

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[145] Ibid. ll. 64-67.

[146] "Affection", ll. 84-87.

[147] Ibid. l. 74.

[148] "Affection". ll. 117-121.

The physicality expressed above in the line "Open thy chaste extended Armes," is a reiteration of Traherne's belief that it is through the affections that the soul finds its physical expression, or its body. The first lines of the poem make this point

> "Affections are the Wings and nimble feet
> The Tongues by which we taste whats Good and Sweet.
> The Armes by which a Spirit doth embrace,
> Or thrust away; the Spurs which mend its Pace."[149]

The affections give the soul its wings, feet, tongue and arms -- the very arms that may now be opened to divine love. In this picture of a divine lover wooing the human soul, one is reminded of the imagery of divine and human love discussed earlier in those passages from *The Kingdom of God* and *Love*. Traherne's approaches vary -- in the cited passage from *The Kingdom of God* he uses the soul/bride image as an extended metaphor, in *Love* he uses human love as a type for divine love, and in "Affection" what divine love initiates, human love reciprocates. But the central fact remains, "Lov is the only Weight of Souls, the Glue/ Or sacred Cement making one of two."[150] And it is this love which, according to Traherne "sanctifies all passions."[151]

Passion and Prudence:

This fulsome praise of passion is all very well, but what are we then to do with Traherne's poems and exclamations of contrition in which he begs to be released from

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[149] Ibid. ll. 1-4.

[150] "Affection". ll. 122-123. The weight of the soul is also love in "Activity" (*COH* 20). One is reminded of Augustine's line "My love is my weight, by it I am carried whithersoever I am carried". See also "Approbation" (*COH* 64) in which "Desire glues the Soul to an Object". Love as that which binds is also seen in *C*.I.51 (bands and cements, ligatures and sinews).

[151] "Affections" l. 74, also see l. 121.

the tyranny of passion, appetite, desire?[152] And how are we to reconcile all of them with the more moderate but no less confident writing on prudence? For whilst Traherne honors the passions and affections of the soul, he also recognizes the need for moderation, prudence, temperance. Without these he does not believe he can lead a life which will enlighten others around him -- a life both excellent and useful, a life of virtue. At the end of a meditation of the nature and effect of prudence, Traherne concludes, "if I will enrich the world or my Selfe with Actions, Prudence must be my Companion, Light and shadow."[153] Light and shadow, behind him and before; this guiding power of prudence is intimated in Traherne's words on prudence from *Select Meditations*, "It [prudence] is of universal Benefit in Finding vertues, nay in Framing composing creating them."[154]. Perhaps it is because he sees prudence as the virtue which leads to the flourishing of other virtues that he writes of prudence: "Of all vertues in the whole world this is that which I most want."[155].

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[152] See, for example "Adultery" (*COH* 28) in which he cries: "O mortify my fleshly Appetite...make me to crucify/ my Loathsom flesh..." And "Appetite"(*COH* 61) in which he would sacrifice his appetite as Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac. In both he uses the language of violence and death: "mortify", "subdue", "eradicate", "Supress", "Annihilate" and "sacrifice", "Die", "circumcise". See also his exclamations of contrition in *SM* such as "O my God how infinite art thou in Goodness! How I in unworthyness! I loath and abhor my Selfe; who have Sinned a[gainst] the Light of thy countenance!" *SM.* II.34.; also *SM.*II.36.; *SM.* III.64.; *SM.* III.70.

[153] *SM.* IV. 57.

[154] *SM.* IV. 57.

[155] *SM.* IV. 57. The high esteem in which Traherne holds prudence is underscored by his singling it out from among all the virtues, especially since his notion of virtue itself is high. Virtue is that by which a person may "become Excellent and usefull." By virtue the human is exalted almost to deity: "Vertue of old hath been counted So Generous and noble a Thing, that it hath not onely made men Gentlemen, But Gods too in the Account of the Heathen... How therefore may a man become Excellent and usefull while He

Traherne is convinced not only of the beauty of prudence as a virtue, but also of its usefulness in every day life. Prudence is both "Delightfull : and of Daily use in every occurrence."[156]. Interestingly enough, the spiritual or ethical value of prudence is rooted in its temporality. Of all the virtues it is the most worldly. Traherne makes this plain in his discussion of prudence in *Christian Ethicks*. The title of the chapter itself sets the temporal tone, speaking of prosperity on earth (rather than heaven), of the subservience of virtue to temporal welfare, and of the reconciliation of duty with convenience[157]. Traherne could not be more unashamedly honest: prudence is practical; it is about what works.[158] And it is about what works for oneself; one's own welfare is at stake. Indeed, one's own welfare is the good which prudence seeks.

Liveth?... by Adorning Himself with all kind of vertues," among which Traherne lists "Justice Prudence Temperance and courage," (*SM*. IV. 21).

[156] *SM*. IV. 57.

[157] The full title to chapter XX is: "*Of Prudence. Its Foundation is Charity, its End Tranquillity and Prosperity on Earth, its Office to reconcile Duty and Convenience, and to make Vertue subservient to Temporal Welfare. Of Prudence in Religion, Friendship, and Empire. The End of Prudence is perfect Charity*." *CE*. p. 152.

[158] For Aristotle, too, prudence is practical. Prudence (*phronesis)* means 'practical common-sense' (see Tredennick's note 1, p. 209 in *Nich. Eth.*). By 'practical' Aristotle is referring to something which can be attained through action. "the man who is capable of deliberation will be prudent. But nobody deliberates about things that are invariable, or about things that he cannot do himself."(*NE*. II40a34-35). According to Aristotle, prudence is "reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man." (*NE*. II40b8-9). This reading of 'practical' and of 'prudence' coincides with Traherne's; in *SM*. IV. 57 he speaks of prudence in terms of choice, and this choice is choice for particular action 'attaining' a way and 'walking' in it.

> "PRUDENCE hath an eye to every Circumstance, and Emergence of our Lives. Its Designe is to make a mans self as Great and glorious as is possible, and in pleasing all the World, to order and improve all Advantages without incurring the least inconvenience:"[159]

Traherne's prudent man does not view his own happiness and the life of virtue as being in any way in opposition, but is both personally prosperous and pleasing to the world without compromising his virtue. The world is not the enemy; rather, according to Traherne, the prudent man seeks to please the world and in pleasing it to increase the advantages and decrease the inconveniences of his own life. This is a very nicely feathered nest indeed. The express purpose of prudence, says Traherne, is

> "To reconcile our Devotion, Obedience and Religion, to our Interest and Prosperity in the World: ... to surmount all Difficulties, to overrule all Disadvantages, to discern all Opportunities, and lay hold on all Occasions of doing Good to our selves."[160]

There appears to be no hint of altruism in this pursuit of prudence; the good we seek appears not to be the common good at all, but "Good to our selves". And yet, this good that we would, by prudence, do to ourselves contains within it the life of virtue. For any true good cannot, in Traherne's view, be a good outside virtue. And real prudence includes the good of others in one's own good. Centuries earlier, Aristotle had asserted that although prudence "is concerned with the self and the individual,...it is impossible to secure one's own good independently of domestic and political science."[161], that is to say, independently of other people. Traherne, too, saw the application of prudence as

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[159] *CE*. p. 152. Again his words echo the sentiment of Aristotle: "Well, it is thought to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous *for himself*;" (*NE*. II40a25-27. italics mine).

[160] *CE*. p. 152-153.

[161] *NE*. II41b33,42a8-9.

primarily a personal matter, but also as a virtue whose exercise would benefit friendship, family and kingdom.[162] For both men, there is an indissoluble tie between prudence and goodness. Where Aristotle asserts "one cannot be prudent without being good."[163] , Traherne insists, "He that is not Good can never be Prudent: for he can never benefit himself, or others." [164]. And so one's own welfare, in the end, cannot be the enemy of another's good. We cannot "effect our own Welfare" without virtue "in the Execution of our Duties"[165]. And it is the task of prudence so to order those virtues that, as they "mingle" in the execution of duty, they may cause each other to flourish.

Although each virtue may be beautiful in itself and every virtue contribute to the happy or blessed or good life of the one who practises those virtues, virtues, according to Traherne, when held in isolation lead not to happiness but to "Disgrace and Infamy"[166]. For, he claims, "we are prone imprudently to expect more from any Vertue than it is able to perform."[167]. Rightly admiring the beauty of a given virtue, we wrongly expect from it good effects beyond its powers alone to give. "We are apt to believe that in every Vertue

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[162] cf. *CE.* pp.156-160 in which Traherne outlines the benefits of prudence for friendship, empire and family.

[163] *NE.* II44a25. He also says, "it is not possible to be good in the true sense of the word without prudence, or to be prudent without moral goodness." (*NE.* II44b31-32).

[164] *CE.* p. 152.

[165] *CE.* p. 153.

[166] *CE.* p. 154.

[167] *CE.* p. 153.

there is an infinite Excellency"[168] and this, whilst it reflects a rightful good opinion of virtue, cannot but lead to disappointment.

> "For when we look upon any single Vertue, and see it so Defective, that it scarce answereth one of many Ends, because we find our selves deceived in our expectation which we thought to be infinite; we are distasted at its *Insufficiency* , and prone to slight it as a poor inconsiderable Business, infinitly short of our Hopes and expectations. Nay and to be discouraged from the practice of it, because we find it attended with many Difficulties and inconveniences, which it is not able to remedy or answer."[169]

Any one virtue, viewed in isolation and taken to its logical extreme, at best disappoints and at worst actually deters the viewer from pursuing the life of virtue. For each virtue also has its limits or insufficiencies which seem defects to the one who has expected infinite good from that virtue. According to Traherne, the fault is not in the virtue's limitation, but in our too long gazing, our over-expectation. Expecting unlimited good in a virtue, we do not limit that virtue in our imagination. And so virtue's extreme is also imagined -- an extreme which frightens and deters.

> "Thus are we deterred from Liberality for fear of the Poverty to which it exposeth us; from Meekness, because it encourageth all People to trample us under feet; from Holiness, because it is scorned and hated in the World; from Fortitude and Courage, because of the Perils and Hazzards, that attend it; from self-Denial, because of the Displeasures we do to our selves in crossing our Appetite."[170]

The problem, as Traherne sees it is that each virtue can only answer the specific need for which it is designed. Together, the virtues equip one for every eventuality where alone they may expose one to harm. "For all these Vertues can answer but one exigence, for which they are prepared... and a mistake in one of them doth expose us to more

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[168] Ibid.

[169] *CE*. p. 154.

[170] Ibid.

Inconveniences, then its Benefit is worth."[171]. And so the virtues, like the various parts of the body, need each other[172]. In fact, Traherne goes so far as to claim, "no Vertue is of any Value as cut off from the rest."[173]. This is where prudence comes into her own. For prudence is the virtue which unites and governs all the others, under her umbrella they flourish, attaining together more than could ever be possible separately.

> "All the Vertues are United by Prudence like several Pieces in a Compleat armour, and disposed all like Souldiers in an Army, that have their several Postes and Charges, or like the several Orders and Degrees in a Kingdom, where...every Man has his Office assigned by the King, and knows his own work, and is fitted for the same."[174]

Prudence is that king, that governor, that overseer.[175] In obedience to prudence all the virtues multiply and thrive: "the Great End is attained by *all*, which no *one* of them alone, was able to Effect:"[176]. And yet each remains distinct. There is no muddling of the virtues into a kind of general goodness -- the harsh edge of self-denial is still sharp; the

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[171] Ibid.

[172] This parallel between virtues and parts of the body is developed more fully by Traherne later in the same chapter on prudence (pp. 154-156). I quote only a small portion of that here: "The Office of the Tongue is to Tast well, of the Nostril to smell well, etc. and there is no Defect in any of these, because they are every one sufficient for its own immediate end,..." to reiterate that the interdependence of virtues is not seen by Traherne as a fault.

[173] CE. p. 154.

[174] CE. p. 153.

[175] "WHILE all the Vertues conspire to supply what is wanting in each other, Prudence is the general Overseer, and Governour of all, ...Prudence seemeth to be the King of Vertues," (CE. p. 153).

[176] CE. p. 153. Similarly Aristotle claims that the one who has prudence also has all the other virtues: "for the possession of the single virtue of prudence will carry with it the possession of them all." (*NE*. II45a14-14).

open arms of liberality as inviting as ever. And it is critical that such distinctions should remain since only in their difference can the distinct benefit of each virtue be felt.

> "one Vertue supplies the Defects of another, and tho every one of them moves in his own Precincts, and does not at all intermeddle with anothers charge, yet the Work is done as effectually as if any one Vertue did all alone."[177]

So it is that the final end of prudence is happiness -- a harmony of virtues lived out in a full life. "THE Last End of Prudence is Eternal Happiness and Glory," concludes Traherne, a lasting happiness which is the end of all of Traherne's questing.

Prudence is not the same thing as wisdom. On this both Traherne and Aristotle agree. In *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle describes wisdom as a combination of intuition and scientific knowledge[178] but prudence as a state "reasoned and capable of action in the sphere of human goods"[179]. Where wisdom knows, prudence does. For both men prudence is primarily concerned with action. According to Aristotle, it is possible to be wise but not prudent; he cites the examples of Anaxagoras and Thales who were wise but "ignorant of their own advantage...their knowledge...exceptional and marvellous and profound and supernatural, but useless, *because the objects of their search are not human goods*."[180]. Prudence must be active towards its end which is the good of the actor; it

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[177] Ibid. The importance of difference will be explored more fully in chapter five.

[178] "Therefore wisdom must be intuition and scientific knowledge: knowledge 'complete with head' [ie. not truncated by severance from first principles] of the most precious truths." (*NE.* II41a18-20).

[179] *NE.* II40b18. Aristotle also outlines in detail why prudence is not to be confused with either understanding or intuition (*NE.* II42a21-43b15). Prudence is imperative; understanding only makes judgements. Prudence apprehends the particular; intuition apprehends the definitions which cannot be logically demonstrated.

[180] *NE.* II41b3-8 (italics mine).

cannot remain inactive and still be prudence since prudence lies in the exercise of wisdom, in virtuous thought put into action. This is why prudence is so much concerned with happiness -- because by it we may actually reach the end towards which we aim. Aristotle asserts that moral virtue "ensures the correctness of the end at which we aim, and prudence that of the means towards it."[181]. Again he states that prudence "does not use wisdom, but provides for its realization;"[182]. Both Traherne and Aristotle see wisdom as higher than prudence[183] since wisdom studies universal truths, but prudence is concerned with particular goods. But whereas Aristotle sees this distinction as marking out wisdom for particular reverence, Traherne seems to exult in the earthy particularities of prudence. Aristotle writes of wisdom and prudence that "each is a virtue of a different part of the soul." concluding that prudence does not exercise authority over higher wisdom, but serves it[184]. But Traherne admires the "crooked Meanders and windings out" by which prudence arrives at "Eternal Happiness". It is as if, for Traherne, the very crookedness of the prudent path is one of its charms. He acknowledges wisdom's superiority but paints prudence in more colorful terms:

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[181] *NE.* II44a8-9.

[182] *NE.* II45a7-8.

[183] *NE.* II41a20-b27. *CE.* p. 160. See also *SM.* IV. 56. in which Traherne begins with wisdom and praises its beauties first before entering into his discussion of prudence: "Begin with wisdom. wisdom is the Light in which Happiness is Enjoyed, ...It is that which... makes us to Aime at the Best of Ends, ...is in all respects Better then Rubies..."etc.

[184] *NE.* II43b16-17. see also *NE.* II45a2023: "At the same time, prudence does not exercise authority over wisdom or over the higher part of the soul, any more than the science of medicine exercises authority over health; for it does not use wisdom, but provides for its realization; and therefore issues orders not to it, but for its sake."

> "It is a strange Vertue, for its Conversant amongst Terrene and inferior Objects, and yet a far more Difficult Vertue then Wisdom it self. Wisdome is a more High and Heavenly Vertue, but its Rules are always fixed, and its objects Stable, where as Prudence hath no set and Stated Rules, but in all occasions, is to mould and shape it selfe, it knows not which way, till it comes to Action."[185]

Prudence keeps one guessing; it evolves, becomes, changes, adapts like magic. Perhaps this is what Traherne finds fascinating about prudence. The final words of his chapter on prudence read like an ancient rune "Its Paths are in the Deep and mighty Waters, among Storms and tempests."[186]

And yet Traherne's prudence also seems so ordinary. It is a choice[187] and a task:

> "Prudence is a choys Selection of the means: wisdom Exercised in Particular Things, Removing obstacles, Improving Evils, Laying Hold of oppertunities, finding Advantages, shunning Extreams, Attaining the mean, and walking warily in it when it is Found." [188]

And the choice is a choice away from extremity and toward balance. One of the designs of prudence, according to Traherne, is "To shun all extreams,"[189] and to find the mean. Prudence alone "Applies the Rule, and Discerns the Golden mean where vertue Lieth,"[190]. This is where Traherne's writing on prudence comes full circle to meet his earlier chapter on the affections of the soul. For in chapter four of *Christian Ethicks*, 'Of

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[185] *CE*. p.160.

[186] *CE*. p. 160.

[187] Aristotle also sees choice and prudence as closely related: "choice cannot be correct in default either of prudence or of goodness, since the one identifies the end and the other makes us perform the acts that are means towards it." (*NE*. II45a5).

[188] *SM*. IV. 57.

[189] *CE*. p. 152.

[190] *SM*. IV. 57.

the Powers and Affections of the Soul;', Traherne addresses the problem of excess. He conceds that although with regard to the highest object (ie.supreme happiness) the affections of the soul cannot be excessive, with regard to inferior objects the soul may indeed default by excess[191].

> "if we look upon inferior Things, which are meerly Accidental to the nature of Felicity, such as the Favour of men, Injuries, Crosses, Temporal successes, the Beauty of the Body, the goods of Fortune, and such like; our affections and passions may be too excessive,"[192]

Not many of these objects are unfelicitous in themselves. Indeed, with the exception of 'injuries' and 'crosses' they are all good things, gifts, beauties, bounties, rewards. Desirable or undesirable, they are all things which, each in their own way, could arouse strong passions -- desire or aversion, gratitude or bitterness. Traherne's point in listing these examples is not to explore each object's value. He is not here concerned with the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness, the intrinsic goodness or evil of the object. The fault he finds with these 'inferior Things', both desirable and undesirable, is their finitude. That they are merely incidental to felicity is what makes them ultimately unimportant. The good or evil they can produce is limited. Our excess is excess because it is unequal to the finite nature of the given thing we desire (or abhor).

> "our affections and passions may be too excessive, because the good or evil of these is but finite; whereas the Good of Sovereign Bliss is altogether infinite, and so is the evil of Eternal Misery."[193]

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[191] "THE Inclinations and affections of the Soul may be Defective or excessive in their exercise towards Objects. In relation to the Highest Object there is no danger of excess. We can never too violently either *love* or *desire* our Supream Happiness;" (*CE.* p. 29).

[192] *CE.* p. 30.

[193] Ibid.

Excess, then, is about an imbalance or inequality between the infinite affection or emotion and its finite object or end. By implication, we cannot be excessive in our loathing of sin since its end -- "Eternal Misery"-- is of infinite proportions. And we cannot be excessive in our love of good or of eternal happiness since that end is also infinite. By this reckoning, Traherne's passion imperative is not imprudent since love of the divine is not love of a finite object but of the infinite. His poetry of contrition with its strong language of mortification and self-loathing is justly passionate when measured against the end it fears -- eternal suffering. For Traherne, in his extremes, matches like for like and so achieves a kind of balance. When he writes in *Christian Ethicks* that, under prudence we should "take heed that we do nothing out of season, nor be guilty of any Defect, or Excess, or Miscarriage"[194], he is not expecting us to live like mice in tiny steps with morsels of emotion, but to be aware of the finitude or infinitude of the objects and ends we long for or abhor and to measure our emotion accordingly. He would not see the affections of the soul amputated by prudence, but marshalled so that, appropriately proportioned, they might most effectively be the soul's 'wings and nimble feet'.

Indeed, not only is extreme love permissible within Traherne's notion of prudence; it is also occasionally required. When the infinite divine loves or desires or hates, it is prudent and appropriate that he should do so extremely. Traherne records "The Infinit Excessivness" of God's love which perseveres despite our sinfulness[195] as an example of appropriate excess. According to Traherne, to love an infinite soul or to love God less

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[194] *CE*. p. 153.

[195] *SM*. III. 94.

than excessively is worse than dishonourable; it is a sin of omission which makes one as culpable as if one had inflicted deliberate injury. "*Lukewarmness* is Profane, as well as *Malice*." he reminds us, "to be beloved Lukewarmly is to be embraced with polluted and filthy Armes."[196]. In the affair of human and divine love, "We cannot be at all Beloved by Almighty GOD unless we are infinitely Beloved" since that which is by nature infinite acts infinitely. And "it is our duty to love him infinitely" in return[197]. Not only is this true of loving God, but it is true of all infinite objects and even of the way we may speak of infinite objects. "In Divine Things there can be no Hyperbolie"[198], insists Traherne. Hence it is that the one who loves the 'curious and fair' woman's curls and eyes and breasts and cheeks, loving the finite in her, loves her not too much, but too little, or in the wrong way[199]. The love of the soul must match its end or object. Once like is matched

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[196] *CE*. p. 88-89. Cf. "He that can submit to an Inferior degree of Lov, or take up with a Smaller Measure in the Deitie, is a degenerat person... Who infinitly desireth,...he only is a truly Sublime, and Generous Soul, that is Worthy of God." (*KOG* 167r-167v).

[197] *CE*. p. 89. Similarly infinite goodness, like infinite love, must desire infinitely: "For infinite Goodness must needs desire with an infinite violence, that all Goodness should be compleat and Perfect:" (*CE*. p. 88).

[198] *SM*. III.7. see also *C*.II.52. and *KOG*. 205r in which he claims that the Truth is "infinitly sublime, and far abov the Reach of all Hyperbolies: tho they be κάθ ὑπερβολὴ ἐισ ὑπερβολὴ. Hyperbolies piled one upon another."

[199] Elizabeth Jennings has written a poem about the complications of human loving based on these lines. See "Words From Traherne"p. 99 in *Elizabeth Jennings Selected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1985. That the beauty of the finite can divert the lover from the love of the infinite soul is a problem of which Traherne was aware, and his writings which seem to suggest a desire to be released from the body often reflect this concern. "the Body is the Seat wherin the Soul Liveth: but anothers Soul the object of its joy" wrote Traherne. That is why a soul would even leave its body if by so doing it could be united to the soul of its beloved. "The union of Souls is So Sublime that a spirit would forsake its Beloved Mansion and Permit it to Die, and Lie for ever in the Dust, to conserve its union with a nothers soul." *SM*.III.93.

with like and the infinite love finds its infinite object there can be never be too much love.

For Traherne, prudence is the king of virtues, eminent and illustrious, the virtue he desires above all others. And it is this, I would venture, at least partly because of Traherne's belief in the possibility of and his pursuit of earthly happiness[200]. Prudence is for the earthbound[201]; in heaven, where there is no question of matching finite with finite and infinite with infinite since all is infinite, prudence will not be needed. When virtues perfectly regulate themselves and the affections of the soul are all focussed on the infinite divine, prudence could seem like a dusty old hat at the back of the cupboard, a relic of earthly days. But heaven will see prudence rewarded, an old retainer honored for its past service, no longer useful but remembered.

> "The truth is there will be Little need of Prudence there among all Stable and Permanent Things, which will Shine there as Eternal Objects to perfect wisdom. But here upon Earth among such Lubricities, variety of Dispositions Apprehensions and occurrences, Prudence is a Thing so Eminent and Illustrous: that it will Shine in Heaven for the Sake of the Benefit it did on Earth, and be far more Bright then the morning Star."[202]

For Traherne, the passion imperative is about loving God and being loved by God with unlimited desire. It is about loving infinite souls with that same kind of passion.

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[200] Traherne's enthusiasm for present happiness is rooted in his belief that heaven is now as well as forever and that eternal happiness is a continuation and fulfillment of that happiness which begins on earth. His criticism of Aristotle's notion of happiness makes this clear: "I do not see that Aristotle made the End of Vertue any other then a finite and temporal Felicity, which is infinitely short of that felicity which is here begun, and enjoyed for ever." (*CE*. p. 58).

[201] Traherne describes prudence as "this celestial vertue, which hath So much Place here upon Earth, as if it had none in Heaven." (*SM*. IV. 57.).

[202] *SM*. IV. 57.

Prudence is about tasting something of that happiness now -- felicity on earth where passion and prudence meet.

The Infinite End:

Just as passion and prudence at first seem to clash in Traherne's notion of desire, so too, do infinity and finitude. This is true not just in terms of desire and object, as seen above, but it is also true in terms of experience or perception. We perceive the infinite but often experience the finite in the working out of desire. And so I want to look at these two aspects of desire -- infinity and finitude.

Infinity could occupy a whole volume in itself, in a discussion of Traherne's work[203]. There is the infinity of God, which he assumes as a characteristic of God by definition. And there is the infinity of man, in God's image. There is absolute infinity and relative or partial infinity. The infinity of space becomes the subject of his final unfinished fifth *Century*,[204] a subject which occupied many of the best minds of the century. Traherne's interest in infinite space is a subject to which I shall return, but his understanding of infinite space is, of course, dependent upon his understanding of the nature of infinity itself and so to this we must first turn our attention.

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[203] "To understand Traherne's concept of 'infinity' is to understand his metaphysical and moral universe, always seen *sub specie infinitatis*, or, *sub specie Dei.*" (Colie, *Paradoxia,* p. 151). "The word 'infinity' might well be selected as the key to Traherne's total devotion," (p.146).

[204] Colie notes (*Paradoxia*, p.69-70) 'the expanding intellectual universe of the Renaissance" and the "infinite space suggested by the new science" as an environment in which poets and philosophers might see the 'real' manifestation of the theory of infinity. She suggests that the prevailing space theory model of the seventeenth century was the combined Platonic and Judaeo-Christian theory of absolute space.

In the fifth chapter of *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne explores the nature of infinity and its extent. For him, the inclinations and powers of the soul are very much tied up with infinity[205]. Properly understood, there are no degrees in Traherne's infinity. A thing either is or is not infinite. A finite thing cannot be made 'more infinite', nor can an infinite thing be made 'less infinite', since any loss makes it not infinite at all, but finite. Infinity is infinite, then, not by addition but by the absence of subtraction. (In this respect, Traherne's 'infinity' is a bit like the words 'virginity' or 'unique'-- there is no such thing as 'more' or 'less virgin' or 'more' or 'less unique'). He writes:

> "An Abatement in that which is Infinit is a Contradiction. It is a strange thing which happeneth in its Nature: The Greatest And vastest, the most excessive Additions cannot make a finit Thing infinit, yet the least abatement and Substraction Imaginable, takes away Infinitly from that which is infinit. For the least Diminution of what is possible, makes it finit.... Finite we know is Infinitly short of Infinit perfection. so that a paradox breaketh forth, whether we will or no.... An infinit Abundance receiveth Infinit loss by the least Substraction. "[206].

The same is true of action as of object, since God's almighty and infinite power, unlike our limited power, "can never exert it self by finit degrees, ...Nor will a finit procession tho proceeding to Eternity ever attain an infinit End."[207]

Infinite virtues like Goodness, Beauty or Wisdom are not diminished by being spent. If all gifts of Goodness were to be given, the Goodness left behind would be "Infinit

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[205] The chapter title "A Philosophical Account of Gods Kingdom drawn from the Inclinations and Powers of the Soul, and from the Nature of Infinitie. All which show his Kingdom to be Compleat and Perfect." makes this point by placing the two in tandem. But the point has been made elsewhere many times over. See for instance, "My Spirit"; "Sight"; "Insatiableness"; "Thoughts IV".

[206] *KOG* 160r-160v.

[207] *KOG* 204r.

still"[208]. Nevertheless, he is able to conceive of a kind of infinity that is relative or partial. The infinity of a grain of sand is a "Relativ Infinity"[209], and the infinite line, for instance, may be broken so that it becomes infinite in one direction only. "But an Infinit Line, and Infinit Goodness are not alike:" asserts Traherne, "For Infinite Goodness cannot be divided, nor is it capable of a Partial Infinitie. There is a great difference between that which is Absolutely infinit, and in some respect.". This is so because, unlike the imagined line, the virtues are grounded in God's continuing gift of power. "Infinit Goodness is founded in the willingness of Allmighty power, to do all the Good That it is able. If it stops any where, it hath found a Period."[210]

For Traherne the infinity of God, of the soul, and of space are absolute infinities. Divine infinity is absolute by definition, and the infinities of the soul and of space are absolute by derivation from the divine. What is more, for him all absolute infinities are infinite in every way. He makes this clear in several places. Here, in the fifth chapter of *The Kingdom of God* he asserts that "What is absolutely so, is evry way Infinit." since "Infinit goodness is absolutely Infinit, and cannot be finit one way, while it is Infinit another."[211]. Similarly, in the second *Century* he claims of Love that "It is both ways infinit", filling

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[208] *KOG* 160v.

[209] "The infinity we speak of in Good Works, is not an Absolute, but a Relativ Infinity: such as a sand is capable of." *KOG* 206r.

[210] *KOG* 161r.

[211] Ibid.

all eternity and yet expressed "in finit Room"[212]. This both/and of infinity is reiterated again in chapters eight and eighteen of *The Kingdom of God* when he describes divine goodness as "that which is Infinit," both "remote yet near at hand within us and without us"[213]; and when he describes the atom as evidence of divine power "being infinitly great in things infinitly small, as well as great."[214]. Even when speaking metaphorically he insists on the same principle -- the sun, an image of the infinite divine essence shines both ways: "His Beams are not one Way, but evry Way."[215]. Absolute infinity which reached infinitely in every direction fitted nicely with the new scientific discovery of infinite space.

Infinite space fascinated Traherne; he could see that its discovery had huge implications for poetry as well as for science[216]. Whereas for centuries poets had loved the perfect circle of earth and heaven, centre and circumference, the circle without beginning and

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[212] *C.* II. 80. Traherne also uses the indefinite article: "in a finit Room".

[213] *KOG* 173v.

[214] *KOG* 217v.

[215] Here, in chapter 20 of *KOG*, Traherne is using the sun as an image of divine essence and emblem of the Holy Trinity as fountain, means and end. He admits that "The Sun is not *Infinitios Infinitus*," that its sphere is limited to this world whilst God's sphere is eternity, but he still finds the sun a useful metaphor. (*KOG* 229v, 232v)

[216] Traherne's fascination with the new sciences can be seen works such as "Ant" and "Atom" (*COH* 54, 80); *C.*III.41.; notes from his *Early Notebook* (see Marks, "Thomas Traherne's Early Studies" *PBSA*, 62 (1968):511-536.); his *Commonplace Book* entry "Cold"; and chapters 18-24 of *KOG*. For a greater exploration of Traherne's connections to scientific discoveries of his day see: Clucas, "Poetic atomism "; Matar, "Solar Mysticism"; Sandbank, "Thomas Traherne on the Place of Man in the Universe", *Scripta Hierosolymatana* (hereafter *SH*), 17 (1966): 121-136.

without end, which symbolised eternity, and man's place on earth, the new astronomy changed the place of the world. As Marjorie Hope Nicolson has noted, the telescope broke that perfect circle and released human imagination to a "spaciousness of thought" [217] hitherto unknown. Where some poets foundered in search of a new metaphor, Traherne simply enlarged himself to include. His metaphors inhabited this new infinity; his circle became the circle whose circumference had no limit and whose centre was everywhere[218]. That is not to say that Traherne had no scepticism about the new discoveries. In *The Kingdom of God* he seems not quite to believe the reports of the existence of new and numberless stars when he writes:

> "Then taking courage to sally out of all Bounds, and soar higher, they pretend new stars lately discovered by the Assistance of telescopes, higher then all the fixed stars that are known: so that for ought we can perceiv (say they) beyond those there may be other stars by no help of Instruments visible to us, by reason of their Distance: And more again beyond those, and so forth onward to everlasting spaces."[219]

But it is not clear whether it is the existence of these stars that is in doubt or the conclusions propounded by the "Atheisticaly disposed" thinkers, who read into these findings an "overthrow of religion"[220]. What is clear is that whether Traherne considers

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[217] Nicolson, *The Breaking of The Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" Upon Seventeenth Century Poetry*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois, 1950.p. 145.

[218] not a new image of course, since its origins are in the ancient Hermetic writings. Nicholas of Cusa and Bruno also used the image before Traherne (see Colie, *Paradoxia*, p. 71-72).

[219] *KOG* 242r.

[220] *KOG* 241v. My own feeling is that it was the attitude of the 'atheistic scientists' rather than their discoveries that Traherne opposes since this criticism appears in the larger context of a defense of religion in the face of science and since the concept of everlasting space, as many of the other new theories, is embraced elsewhere in his work. Cf note 222.

the new discoveries are true or not, they are no threat to his faith. After five pages of examining the claims of Hevelius' *Selenographia* and the assertions of other "Wits of the Age", Traherne concludes:

> "What if the Stars should be all inhabited, what would follow? May we conclude thence, that there is no GOD? no Religion? No Blessedness? verily it is more Apparent, that there is a God, a Religion, a Blessedness thereby. What if beyond the Heavens there were Infinit Numbers of Worlds at vast unspekable distances?...Would that abolish Heaven? verily in my conceit, it enricheth it. For it is more answerable to Goodness, Wisdom, and Felicitie, and demonstrates visible that there is a GOD, and that Divines hav not in vain affirmed GOD to be all Act, since his Power is exerted in filling his Omnipresence with infinit Treasures."[221]

True to form, Traherne has found, in this new and, for some, unlikely territory, an affirmation of his basic theological themes and structures and a source of blessedness. Not uncritically, then, he embraced the new sciences as food to his faith, since each new discovery opened a world of miracle and afforded new reaches of capacity.[222] In Nicolson's view Traherne was the seventeenth century climax of the poets of aspiration. Rosalie Colie also sees Traherne as a poet of infinite aspiration. In fact, for Colie, infinity is "the key to his metaphysical and moral universe"[223], a universe in which it is only by infinitized aspiration that a true understanding of the infinitely infinite God can be reached. For Colie infinite space is primarily about what is out there, and 'infinite

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[221] *KOG* 244v-245r.

[222] Eg: "The Circulation" echoes Harvey's discoveries; in "Sight" the inward eye of imaginative intuition is likened to the telescope. Infinite space is incorporated into his theology, so that, in the words from *The Kingdom of God*, for example, infinite space becomes "a consequent of Eternal Wisdom".(*KOG*. 170v). Similarly, in his 'treatise of Atoms" (*KOG* 216v-221r) the atom being infinitely small and yet the most stable thing, is a model of humility. A study on light (*KOG* chapter 19) becomes an allegory of divine nature: "Should we now turn all those Realities into an Allegorie: God is Light ...". An experiment with fire and an empty cup (*KOG* 249v ff.) becomes a lesson on the invisible agents which work to the benefit of men and to the praise and glory of God.

[223] Colie, "Thomas Traherne and the Infinite:", *HLQ*. 21 (1957): 69-82. p. 71.

aspiration' is the zenith of Traherne's ethic. This gloss engages with Traherne's call to ascend from temporal to eternal, but in this 'outward' reading of Traherne's infinity, the "internal infinity" of the fourth *Century*, that infinity which is "both ways infinite" is lost. What the new sciences gave Traherne was as much to do with the microscope as with the telescope. As Nicolson notes: "When he saw eternity in a grain of sand, he was speaking not only mystically but microscopically."[224]. What both of these valuable studies miss is the absolute centrality of infinity to Traherne's other theme of felicity.

For Traherne, infinite space is not tangential, a subject of pleasant speculation extraneous to his great theme of felicity. It is an integral part of his doctrine of enjoyment; it is absolutely necessary if joy is to be endless. In *The Kingdom of God* he reasons that just as it would be a foolish thing to choose transitory joys when one could choose eternal ones, so it is foolish to choose small joys when one could choose expansive ones. Since these expansive joys are also eternal, they are ever expanding, and so they require infinite space, not just a world of joy, but Immensity itself. So it is that "Even Infinit space is a consequent of Eternal Wisdom: being prepared to be the Repositorie of its endless Enjoyments."[225] The image of infinite space as a repository or storeroom cited here is not unique in Traherne. In several places in the *Centuries*, infinity is "the Room and Place of our Treasures, the Repositorie of our Joys,... a Cabinet, a Receptacle, and a

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[224] Nicolson. *Breaking of the Circle:* p. 173.

[225] *KOG* 170v-171r.

Storehouse"[226]. Because infinite space is boundless, there is always room for more in this storeroom, yet infinite space is not empty. Infinite space is always being filled; it was designed expressly for that purpose. "Infinity of Space is like a Painter's Table," writes Traherne, "prepared for the Ground and feild of those Colors that are to be laid theron. Look how great he intends the Picture, so Great doth he make the Table. It would be an Absurditie to leav it unfinished, or not to fill it. To leav any part of it Naked and bare, and void of Beauty, would render the whole ungrateful to the Ey,"[227]. The fact that there is always more room in Traherne's infinite space speaks not of emptiness then, but of capacity -- a capacity which, despite being always filled, is never spent[228]. It must be so since not only is infinite space the receptacle for our ever expanding joys, but also the place where almighty power may be exercised. Here Traherne's image shifts from storehouse to theatre, from accommodating objects to accommodating action. Except for infinite space, God's almighty power would be "Straitned", Traherne writes, "for lack of

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[226] *C*.V.2.; *C*.V.3.; *C*.V.4. Infinity "without us is the Chamber of our Infinit Treasures, and within us the Repositorie and Recipient of them."(C. II. 81.). See also *SM*. I.93. in which eternity is a bottle wherein the tears of the penitent are stored. Traherne's overlapping of Eternity and Infinity will be discussed in the following paragraph.

[227] *C*.V.5. See also "Felicitie" in which felicity is "No empty Space" but full of sight and soul and life.

[228] The link between infinite space and capacity is an important one in Traherne since it is in exercising our capacity that the soul becomes like the Deity. See "Silence": "A vast and Infinit Capacitie,/ Did make my Bosom like the Deitie,/ In Whose Mysterious and Celestial Mind/ All Ages and all Worlds together shind." ; and "My Spirit" in which, in early innocence, "My Essence was Capacitie". Infinite space and our capacity to receive the Deity by receiving it is also the subject of *A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God* in which Traherne urges his reader to, " Measure all the Spaces beyond the Heavens./ Receive the Deity of the eternal God,/ and those Spaces/ By him unto thee." *Serious and Pathetical...* ed. Roy Daniells, University of Toronto Studies, No. 12, (Toronto, 1941), p. 29.

a Theatre Magnificent enough". "...there must of Necessity be an infinit Capacitie to answer that Power,"[229].

It is when Traherne moves his discussion of infinite space from objects to action, in the *Centuries*, that he begins to overlay Infinity and Eternity. He has described what infinite space is, now he ventures where we may perceive it. Just as the present moment is in some sense the only moment, so for Traherne, the present space is the only space; the two are tied together for him. The present moment "exhibits infinite space" since in the space which is here now in front of us, we see the only space that is[230]. And yet there are other moments and other spaces. For just as there must be an infinite place for infinite treasures and joys, so there must be an infinite duration of time in which infinite moments may be held. He explains as follows:

> "This is the Space that is this Moment only present before our Ey, the only Space that was, or that will be, from Everlasting to Everlasting. This Moment Exhibits infinit Space, but there is a Space also wherin all Moments are infinitly Exhibited, and the Everlasting Duration of infinit Space is another Region and Room of Joys. Wherin all Ages appear together, all Occurrences stand up at once, and the innumerable and Endless Myriads of yeers that were before Creation, and will be after the World is ended, are Objected as a Clear and Stable Object, whose several Parts extended out at length, giv an inward Infinity to this Moment, and compose an Eternitie that is seen by all Comprehensors and Enjoyers."[231]

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[229] *C*.V.4. That God's power should be exerted infinitely is important to Traherne not because it shows his might, but because it shows his love. "For we could never believe that He loved us infinitely unless He exerted all His power." writes Traherne, "For *κατα Δυναμιν* is one of the principal properties of Love: as well as *ἐκαινου ἑνεκα.*. To the utmost of its power, as well as for His sake." *C*.II.82.

[230] "Eternity is at one time." Writes Traherne (*CE* p.68). Similary, Henry More's *Divine Dialogues* (which we know Traherne read) speaks of eternity as follows: "the Duration of God is all of it, as it were, in one steddy and permanent... Instant at once." ... "as if all things and Actions which ever were, are, or shall be, were at this very Instant, and so always, really present and existent before him" (*DD*, p. 58-60).

[231] *C*.V.6.

Thus eternity is born and duration (time) becomes another room (place). What matters is the endlessness of both[232]. There is "an inward infinity" in the present moment and "an eternity compose[d]" by the holding of that same moment within the infinite duration of infinite space, where the present moment takes its place alongside "all moments" there "infinitely exhibited". Both capacious and full, the present moment becomes a metaphor for infinite space; it is filled and yet beyond the present moment there is more to come.

Infinite space then is important because it is the repository of our joys, because it is the field of Almighty power, because in it the infinite duration of moments may be held; but also because it is in infinite space, Traherne believes, that we come to know the nature of God and of ourselves.

Traherne's infinite space is full of God. It is the theatre not only of God's power but also of his omnipresence.

> "His Omnipresence is an Endless Sphere,
> Wherin all Worlds as his Delights appear.
> His Beauty is the Spring of all Delight,
> Our Blessedness, like His, is infinit.
> His Glory Endless is and doth Surround
> And fill all Worlds, without or End or Bound."[233]

The "endless sphere" of God's omnipresence is like the other "Endless Sphere" of the soul, described in "My Spirit", a sphere with its own centre whose boundary is

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[232] On duration cf *C*.IV.7. This overlaying of infinity and eternity occurs also in Jackson's *Treatise of the Divine Essence* in which, citing Plotinus, he writes, that "Eternitie is infinite of life." (p.70).

[233] "Thoughts. IV." ll. 29-32.

everywhere.[234] This image echoes the well known hermetic image of the circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. "my Soul is an Infinit Sphere in a Centre."[235] writes Traherne; and God is in that centre: "for Being wholy evry where, His omnipresence was wholy in evry Centre : and He could do no more, then that would bear : Communicat Himself wholy in evry Centre."[236]

According to Traherne the human spirit is "a Centre in Eternity Comprehending all: and filled all about... in an Endless maner with infinit Riches"[237]. So it is that we live and move and have our being in God. As we have already seen, God's infinity, far from making him unknown and remote, implies immediate proximity. He writes, "I am made... an Infinit Sphere in which thou Dwellest forevermore"[238]. The human soul, as much as limitless space, is the home of God's infinity. But Traherne goes even further; he claims that infinity is individually in the soul as God is; and that infinity, the soul and God are unknowable as separate entities.

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[234] The soul, "being Simple like the Deitie/ In its own Centre is a Sphere/ Not shut up here, but evry Where....an Endless Sphere,/ Like God Himself;" "My Spirit" ll. 15-18, 30-31.

[235] *C.* II. 80.

[236] *C.* II. 82.

[237] *C.* II. 80.

[238] *SM* I. 82.

> "The truth of it is, It [infinity] is individualy in the Soul : for GOD is there, and more near to us than we are to our selvs. So that we cannot feel our Souls, but we must feel Him, in that first of Properties, infinit Space."[239]

To Traherne, the infinite space of the universe is more the soul's home than the limited world of earth can ever be. In his scale of things, the world, in all its wonder and beauty and magnitude is but a small thing in comparison to the human soul which, in its infinite capacity, he sees as boundless -- a fit companion for the omnipresence and eternity of God.

> "Alass," he writes, "the WORLD is but a little Centre in Comparison of you. ...The Omnipresence and Eternity of God are your Fellows and Companions. And all that is in them ought to be made your familiar Treasures. Your Understanding comprehends the World like the Dust of a Ballance, measures Heaven with a Span, and esteems a thousand yeers but as one Day. So that Great Endless Eternal Delights are only fit to be its Enjoyments."[240]

Here, as elsewhere, we see that whilst the soul is the repository of human infinity, the mind's 'understanding' is where that infinity is exercised. "What shall we render unto God for this infinit Space in our Understandings!" Traherne asks[241]. This infinite space is the foundation for infinite blessedness, infinite love and infinite capacity. Infinite space is within us and without; the infinity of God is our home and our end -- and yet our experience of life is so often experience of the finite.

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[239] *C.* II. 81. For Traherne, infinity is "the first Thing which is naturaly Known. Bounds and Limits are Discerned only in a Secondary maner." He illustrates this with the example of a blind man: "Suppose a Man were Born Deaf and Blind. By the very feeling of His Soul He apprehends infinit about Him, infinit Space, infinit Darkness. He thinks not of Wall and Limits till he feels them and is stopt by them. That things are finit therfore we learn by our Sences. but Infinity we know and feel by our Souls: and feel it so Naturaly, as if it were the very Essence and Being of the Soul." (*C.*II.81).

[240] *C.* I. 19.

[241] *C* II.82. See also *SM* I.91 in which it is his understanding that reflects the perfect glory of the divine image.

It is this basic struggle of the infinite soul in a finite human life[242] that is at the heart of much of Traherne's work. His image of the white-paged infant whose spirit still remembers eternity and infinity, a stranger in the world of 'custom' who is frustrated and alien[243] is, in part, a picture of this uncomfortable infinite/finite union. There is, in Traherne's infant, almost from the very beginnings of consciousness, or of self-consciousness, a capacity for union with the divine, a capacity, the use of which, it will take him the rest of his life to recover.

The Finite Means:

Traherne believes that infinity is our home and that this concept is not just something that our wishful imagination conceives but that it is a reality that our deepest self acknowledges, that it is a kind of first principle, the first thing naturally known[244]. Traherne describes how in his infancy "something infinite behind everything appeared: which talked with my expectation and moved my desire."[245]. God's infinity is "the

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[242] see *SM*.II.92. "There is in a man a Double selfe, according as He is in God, or in the world. In the world He is confined, and walketh up and Down, in Little Roome: but in God He is evry where."

[243] "An Empty Book is like an Infants Soul" (*C* I.1); "that Divine Light wherewith I was born..." (*C* III.1); "Innocence", "Eden"; the child's innocence corrupted by custom: (*C* III.2, 7); the infant as stranger to this world: "The Salutation", to name a few.

[244] *C*.II.81: "Infinit is the first Thing which is naturaly Known...And this we know so Naturaly, that it is the only *Primo et Necessario Cognitum in Rerum Naturâ*: Of all Things the only first and most Necessarily Known." Cf. note 239.

[245] *C*. III. 3.

peculiar possession of evry Soul"[246], we sense our right to participate in it as we are, from infancy, "Drawn with the Expectation and Desire of som Great Thing"[247]. It is our beginning and it is the end toward which we move. How can it be then, that human experience is so often experience of the finite? We may be on a journey into the infinite, but it is our finite feet that do much of the walking. We hunger, we thirst, we want and need, we experience lack and discontent-- all manifestations of the limited or finite nature of things. What is more, because we are creatures of infinite capacity, we experience these things infinitely. This is where our infinite capacity clashes with the disappointment of the finite. This is, if you like, the dark side of desire, not the bright stars of heavenly aspiration, but the sting of human insatiability. The "Reason of all our Ambition, curiositie, Desire, and Insatiable Avarice" hangs on the disparity between the unlimited capacity we sense in our selves and the limited nature of our experience. "We feel our Right by a tac[t]ile Instinct, and our want of it by open Experience."[248]

Traherne is alive to the burning possibilities of insatiability and throughout his work insatiability is seen as a good. Where other Christian and other spiritual writers may recommend a paring down of appetite, Traherne insists: "It is of the nobility of man's

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[246] *KOG* 207r. Here the particular quality of God's infinite nature to which Traherne refers is infinite goodness. In the *Centuries*, infinity is "individualy in the Soul: for GOD is there," (*C.*II.81.).

[247] *C.*I.2. The "som Great Thing" of the *Centuries* has been understood in several ways -- usually as some form of blessedness or felicity, but always as something eternal and infinite.

[248] This and the preceding quote *KOG* 206-207r.

soul that he is insatiable. … Insatiability is good."[249]. It is good for two reasons: 1) because it leads the desiring human to seek and to carry on seeking; and 2) because it is a divine quality.

In his poem "Desire", Traherne praises God for giving him that "Eager Thirst," which, by never being satisfied, "did incessantly a Paradice/ Unknown suggest, and som thing undescribed/ Discern,"[250]. Similarly, in "Dissatisfaction", the questing soul is the endlessly unsatisfied soul. Here we see insatiability as a driving force of the spiritual journey. Whatever we have, we always seek something more, and that more, for Traherne, is no less than the divine. In this reading of desire, even her customarily ugly sisters, covetousness and avarice, are redeemed. "*Ambition* and *Covetousness*" are described in *Christian Ethicks* as "Inclinations of the soul, by the one of which we are carried to *Glory*, by the other to *Treasure*."[251] And in the poetry, desire is not ashamed to be called "Heavenly Avarice", that "Soaring Sacred Thirst,/ Ambassador of Bliss" which brings him to "the true and real Joys' precisely *because* it makes him "apt to Prize, and Taste, and See"[252]. In this way the pursuit of one's desired object becomes a heavenly

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[249] *C.* I. 21, 22.

[250] "Desire" ll. 2-11.

[251] *CE*. p.29. See also, *CE* p 54 " It is the Glory of man, that his *Avarice* is insatiable, and his *Ambition* infinite,". Ambition and Avarice are praised in *CE* p. 173, and are tied up with the virtue of Hope (*CE* p. 122), a point to which we shall return at the end of chapter four.

[252] "Desire" l. 8. and 53-61.

path or a "way to Blessedness". And the one who attends to desire's insatiable demands is not necessarily on the road to perdition.

Traherne is not alone in understanding insatiableness as a dynamic feature of the spiritual life. As Matar notes[253], there were several mid-seventeenth century theologians who shared Traherne's imagery of insatiableness and infinite desire. John Smith, Nathaniel Culverwell, and Peter Sterry, drawing, in part, on the mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa, whose God was limitless and therefore continually sought and never entirely found, used images of expansion and journey, and of infinite proportion similar to the images used by Traherne[254]. When Gregory writes: "We can conceive of no limitation in an infinite nature; and that which is limitless cannot by its nature be understood"[255] we hear not only echoes of Augustine's "What then are we to say of God?"[256], but also a bass note over which, thirteen centuries later, Sterry would blend: "God is... Being it self in its absoluteness, undivided, unrestrained, unconfined,...in All, thro' All, on every Side,

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[253] "Mysticism and Sectarianism in Mid-17th Century England", *SM*. XI,1:Spring 1988. 55-65. Marks had already established the link between Traherne and the Cambridge Neo-platonists who feature in Matar's article. For further discussion see: Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", *PMLA*. 81 (1966): 521-534.

[254] See for example, Sterry's lines: "The *Desires* of man are *Infiniteness* budding forth from its *Seed* in the Soul. These *Desires* are ever in Motion, and Restless, till they put forth into *Infiniteness* itself' (*The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God*, 1683, p. 139). On desire and motion see Howe (note [illegible]).

[255] *Patrologia Graeca* (hereafter *PG*) 44, col. 941; trans. by Mursurillo, as *From Glory to Glory* (hereafter *FGTG*), (Scribner's: New York, 1961), p. 213.

[256] "What , then, brethren, are we to say of God? for if you have understood what you want to say, it is not God. If you have been able to understand, you have understood something other than God." Sermon 52, section 6.16. "To reach out a little towards God with the mind is great blessedness but to understand is wholly impossible." Sermon 117, section 3.5.

beneath, above, beyond All, every where the same, ...nowhere Bounded"[257]. And, "God cannot be bounded, or limited... Will you limit the Holy one of Israel?"[258]. For Smith, as for Traherne, the infinity of God is the ultimate object of our 'restless appetite': "We alwaies find a *restless appetite* within our selves which craves for some *Supreme and Chief good*, and will not be satisfied with any thing less then *Infinity* it self."[259]. Indeed, it would seem that not only is the object, God, infinite, but that the subject -- the soul and her craving must likewise remain unlimited in her quest for the infinite other. In the Nyssan tradition, the soul remains insatiable partly because her object remains to some extent unknowable. To carry on the above quote from Gregory:

> "We can conceive then of no limitation in an infinite nature; and that which is limitless cannot by its nature be understood. And so every desire for the Beautiful which draws us on in this ascent is intensified by the soul's very progress towards it. And this is the real meaning of seeing God: never to have this desire satisfied."[260]

For Gregory, this infinite desire without satisfaction does not tire the soul on its spiritual journey, but gives it a force which drives the soul towards God. Each step nearer to God intensifies desire and every new desire heightens anticipation in the journey's next step. As Matar writes, "For Gregory, the experience of God consists in a continual progress from one level of divine knowledge to another: it is a ceaseless dialectic of participation

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[257] Sterry quoted in Pinto, *Peter Sterry, Platonist and Puritan*, p. 90.

[258] Sterry, *The Appearance of God in the Soul of Man* (London, 1710) p. 121&388.

[259] John Smith, *Select Discourses* (London: 1660). Discourse V, p. 135.

[260] *PG* 44, col. 405 A, trans, in *FGTG* p. 147-148.

in and distance from an infinite God."[261]. He continues: "The mystical progress in God, the movement "from glory to glory", represented for them [Culverwell, Smith, Sterry, Traherne] the height of the Christian faith." their experience of seeking God was an experience of "perpetual and unlimited progress, an insatiable stretching forth".[262] As Gregory put it:

> "The soul that looks up towards God, and conceives that good desire for His eternal beauty, constantly experiences an ever new yearning for that which lies ahead, and her desire is never given its full satisfaction. Hence she never ceases to 'stretch forth [ἐπεγεινομενε] to those things that are before,' ever passing from her present stage to enter more deeply into the interior, into the stage which lies ahead."[263]

Spiritual maturity consists in the constant seeking. In his *Great Catechism*, Gregory wrote of the soul in journey, "ever making one discovery a stepping-stone to another, ever reaching forth."[264]. As the soul journeys, it is as if each discovery opens another door but does so without ever finding the final room. And yet there is more of a sense of progress than frustration in Gregory's tone. "For those who are rising in perfection, the limit of the good that is attained becomes the beginning of the discovery of higher goods. Thus they never stop rising, moving from one new beginning to the next."[265]. Writing just before Traherne, John Smith described the progress of the soul in similar terms of

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[261] Matar, "Mysticism and Sectarianism…". p. 57.

[262] Ibid.

[263] *PG* 44, col. 1305 A, trans. in *FGTG* p. 268.

[264] *The Great Catechism* in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.). (Michigan, rpt. 1972) V:492.

[265] *P.G.* 44, col. 914 C. trans, in *F.G.T.G.*., p.213.

upward movement towards an infinite God, although his imagery exchanges feet for wings: the soul,

> "finds then no more ends nor bounds to stop its swift and restless motion. It may then fly upwards from one heaven to another, till it be beyond all orb of finit being, swallowed up in the boundless abyss of divinity."[266]

The soul in 'swift and restless motion', the soul 'ever reaching forth', a soul which is never given 'its full satisfaction'. These are the images of Gregory and of Smith. Culverwell, too, wrote of the necessity of continual effort:

> "one must nowhere relax the tension of the toil nor stand aside from the struggles lying before him nor pay attention to things of the past if any good thing has been done, but one must forget those things according to the apostle, stretch oneself [ἐπεκτεινεζσαι] out to what lies before and shatter the heart with thoughts of toil, holding the desire of righteousness without satiety [ἀκορεζτον]."[267]

Again, continual effort is required though final satisfaction is not to be expected by the 'panting soul'. In his better known, *The Light of Nature*, Culverwell included a short treatise, *The Panting Soul,* in which he wrote:

> "though this may seem very wearisome and tedious, to be alwaies a panting: yet the Christian soul findes far more incomparable sweetness...he findes more of this in very panting after God, then any worldling can, when with the greatest complacency he takes his fil of his choicest delights."[268]

At first all of this may sound similar to Traherne's thought; and in some ways it is. He too, writes of the thirsty soul, "panting and faint," in its pursuit of felicity[269]. His poem,

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[266] *Select Discourses* (Edinburgh, 1756), p. 102.

[267] Quoted in Rondal E. Heine, *Perfections in the Virtuous Life* (Philadelphia, 1975), p. 88.

[268] Culverwell, *The Panting Soul*, p. 71.

[269] "Dissatisfaction", l. 29. see also: "Desire"

'Insatiableness' is one of his works that conveys something of the desperation of the seeking soul:

> "...Can I no Rest nor Satisfaction find?
> ...Till I what lies
> In Time's beginning find;
> Must I till then for ever burn?
>
> Not all the Crowns; not all the heaps of Gold
> On Earth; not all the Tales that can be told,
> Will Satisfaction yield to me:
> ... Till I what was before all Time descry,
> The World's Beginning seems but Vanity."[270]

Here we see a soul in an agony of desire, craving knowledge of its origins, knowledge of an elusive divine, craving meaning. It would *seem* then, that Traherne does follow Gregory's model -- infinite appetite for the infinite divine being at the heart of the Nyssan tradition. And it is probably safe to agree with the spirit of Matar's assessment when he claims that whenever Traherne "used 'Insatiableness', it was to affirm a Nyssan view of an infinite God and of a soul that infinitely seeks him."[271].

But whereas Gregory, and to some extent Smith and Culverwell, suggest an essential divine unknowableness as necessary for the sustenance of insatiability in the soul's quest, there is no such necessity in Traherne. For him, the infinity of God is not something remote. Neither is it wholly out of his reach. There is an unlimited 'stretching forth', as there is in Gregory, Smith and Culverwell. But it is not a movement towards the exterior

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[270] 'Insatiableness', ls. 2, 8-13, 21-22.

[271] Matar, "Mysticism and Sectarianism", p. 58.

unknown.[272] In fact, the infinity of God is, for Traherne, as much a present reality as a distant one; so much already in the human soul that eventual consummation seems hardly necessary.

> "The Infinity of God is our enjoyment," he writes, "the ground and foundations of all our satisfactions, ...It surroundeth us continually on every side, it fills us, and inspires us. It is so mysterious that it is wholly within us, and even then it wholly seems and is without us."[273]

For Traherne there is no escape from the infinity of God, no place where his infinity is not. Where Gregory sees the infinity of God as making God ultimately beyond our grasp, Traherne sees that same infinity as indicating God's immediacy. His infinity is where we live; and we are where God's infinity dwells:

> "It [God's infinity] is more inevitably and constantly, more nearly and immediately our dwelling place, than our cities and kingdoms and houses. Our bodies themselves are not so much ours, or within us as that is."[274]

Such immediate contact with the infinity of God is neither optional nor temporary. Traherne admonishes his readers to be sensible of this fact, not because such assent would gain them greater proximity to the divine, but because the immediacy of God's infinity is simply true, and so not to see it is to live away from a clear vision of oneself and of the world.

> "The immensity of God is an eternal tabernacle. Why then we should not be sensible of that as much as of our dwellings, I cannot tell, unless our corruption and sensuality destroy us. We ought always to feel, admire, and walk in it. It is more clearly objected to the eye of the soul, than our castles and palaces to the eye of the body. Those accidental buildings may be thrown down, or we may be taken from them, but this can never be removed, it abideth for ever. It is

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[272] For Traherne, it is more of a stretching forth to something internal and essential: "When I retire first I seem to com in my selfe to a centre, in that centre I find Eternitie and all its Riches." *SM* I. 81.

[273] *C* V. 2. This is part of Traherne's larger claim that we are in God and he in us; see: *SM* I. 82, *SM* III.14, *C* IV.72. etc.

[274] Ibid.

> impossible not to be within it, nay, to be so surrounded as evermore to be in the centre and midst of it, wherever we can possibly remove, is inevitably fatal to every being."[275]

Our infinite aspirations and questions, our insatiability, Traherne suggests, are unavoidable since to be human is also to share in this divine quality -- infinity. We desire infinitely not because God is so completely other and unknowable in his infinity, but because his infinity is in us. This notion, that we contain a divine infinity within us, is asserted again and again in Traherne. It is an idea he refined over time, submitting it to scrutiny and clarifying it when necessary. The Lambeth Manuscript gives us some evidence of this process. In *Inducements to Retiredness*, the first work in the manuscript, against Traherne's bold claim "for Man is such a Wonderfull Creature that Infinity & Eternity is within Him"[276] there appears a marginal comment from his 'critical reader' which warns:

"Infinity and Eternity is in man by Derivation from God; not as it is in God, for in him it is his very essence in us by communication from him Only." It would seem that Traherne took this correction to heart since, by the time he came to write the final work in the manuscript, *The Kingdom of God*, his description of man as wonderful admits that

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[275] Ibid.

[276] This claim comes in a larger context of his claims about the importance of retirement from the world: "For in Retirement alone can a Man approach to that wch is Infinit & Eternal. Infinity & Eternity are only to bee seen by the Inward Ey. By Expanding the Understanding, & by the Introversion of the Soul, do we approach unto those: namely by observing & Noting what is within. for Man is such a Wonderfull Creature that Infinity & Eternity is within Him. And if those are within Him, all ye Things they contain, are within Him likewise. For it is as Easy, for a Cabinet to be in a Palace & yet those Treasures wth wch it is replenished to be out of the Palace; as for the Eternity of God to be in the Soul of Man, while the Things contained in Eternity are out of the soul, in wch Eternity is contained. (*ITR*. 1r.).

any excellency in the soul is that "which it deriveth from the Nature and power of GOD,"[277].

Being made in the divine image, by derivation blessed with infinity and by nature largely limited to the finite, our experience of insatiability is often tinged with discomfort. But this discomfort is seen by Traherne as a cause for praise. In his poem "Desire", for instance, Traherne can praise God for the 'eager thirst' and 'restlesse longing' which, from his birth, disallowed any rest until he should find 'the true and real Joys'. In this poem he calls desire by many names: 'a burning Ardent fire, A virgin Infant Flame', An Inward Hidden Heavenly Love', 'soaring Sacred Thirst', 'restlesse longing'and 'famine', as well as the unexpected 'Heavenly Avarice', and 'Ambassador of Bliss'. In his description of desire, Traherne offers a kind of collection of images rather than a definition; in fact, he seems to be not so much concerned about defining the thing at all as he is in conveying the power of its working in him. He writes of his experience of desire in the first person; it is,

> "A Love with which into the World I came,
> ...Which in my Soul did Work and move,
> And ever ever me Enflame,
> With restlesse longing..."

He is approached and inhabited by desire:

> "This Soaring Sacred Thirst,
> Ambassador of Bliss, approached me first,

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[277] *KOG.* 251v. Here the infinite that man has by derivation is God's infinite goodness, his omnipresence, his divine spark.. In *The Kingdom of God*, that these qualities should be derived is important to Traherne's developed notion of communication since he believes that "Evry thing therfore receiveth from all and communicateth to all, after its Kind and manner."

Making a Place in me,
That made me apt to Prize, and Taste, and See,"[278]

In all of this he is initially acted upon, and he therefore acts. His questing is the result of a gift received, for which he gives thanks: "For giving me Desire,...be Thy Name for ever praisd by me."[279] Here we see desiring as, in a strange way, an act of fulness -- it is an exercise of capacity bestowed rather than a manifestation of lack. It may be interesting to observe the contrast here between Traherne's thought and the thought of another seventeenth century poet and priest whose work we know Traherne read[280] -- George Herbert. According to "The Pulley", our human restlessness is not the result of a gift bestowed, but a gift witheld. At the creation of man the Trinity, having bestowed strength, beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure, decide to withold 'rest':

"'For if I should,' said He,
'Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me
And rest in nature, not the God of nature;
So both should losers be."[281]

The result is "repining restlessness", wealth and weariness. We are tossed, at last, to God's breast, if not by goodness, then by sheer exhaustion. This may resonate, at certain stages, with one's experience of life, but lacks the energy and passion of Traherne's

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[278] Here and above quoted from "Desire", ll. 4, 6-8, 53-56.

[279] Ibid. ll. 1 & 13.

[280] In *KOG* Traherne quotes the following lines from one of Herbert's poems, "Longing": "Mothers are kind, becaus Thou art (saies the Divine poet) And dost dispose to them a part; Their children them, and they suck thee, more free!"

[281] "The Pulley" ls. 11-15. quoted from Witherspoon and Warnke, p. 857.

'prizing and tasting and seeing'. Where Herbert's restlessness repines, Traherne's restlessness thirsts and tastes and has.

Restless longing in Traherne, like hunger and thirst and all the other lacks and needs, is the springboard of infinite joys, for the limitations of the finite serve as a continual reminder to our forgetful selves that we are creatures of infinity. Our insatiability, grounded in God's infinity, which is by direct image, our own, is good, true and unavoidable. What is more, according to Traherne, insatiable desire is at the heart of God.

Wanting like a God:

"You must Want like a GOD that you may be Satisfied like GOD.", "He is from Eternity full of Want", "He made us to Want like GODS"[282]. This wanting in God is the foundation of all desiring in Traherne. The sexual imagery of *Love* and *The Kingdom of God* is a picture of the Divine lover in pursuit of its beloved, the soul. The passion of this desiring God is the model of our passion, God's prudence in desiring an eternal and infinite soul, is an example of the prudence we should exercise. The infinite aspiration with which we reach infinitely towards the infinite end, which is the love of God, is mirrored in God's infinite reaching towards us. And the insatiability of our hungers and thirsts echoes the great hunger for souls in the heart of God. All of this is implied in Traherne's simple phrases above. Desire in Traherne means we must want like a God who is from eternity full of want.

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[282] *C.* I. 44, *C.* I. 42, *C.* I. 41.

What terms can one use to understand this wanting God? Certainly 'need' is one of the words Traherne uses alongside 'want'. In meditation 42 of the first *Century*, when he writes, "Want in GOD is a Treasure to us. For had there been no Need He would not hav Created the World, nor Made us", 'want' and 'need' seem to be used synonymously. Yet in the preceding meditation 'need' is something more concrete than 'want'; 'needs' lending an external reality to 'wants' which are, in this case an internal action of the mind: "Were there no Needs, Wants would be Wanting themselvs: And Supplies Superfluous."[283]. And if these apparent contradictions were not enough, in the same meditation, Traherne plays further with the word 'want', listing the many things God wanted "from all eternity" and concluding in both a pun and a paradox: "He wanted, yet he wanted not, for he had them.". This playing with 'want' leads me to believe that Traherne was aware of the ambiguities of the word he had chosen; that, in fact, the ambiguity of 'want' was deliberate. I would suggest that the occasional ambiguity of the word 'want' is, in fact, deeply serious and functional, allowing space for the kind of wit Seelig refers to in *The Shadow of Eternity* : a wit which 'represents a world view" -- "the metaphysical cast of mind ...that saw in a single... event several kinds or levels of meaning."[284]

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[283] In *Select Meditations*, this view is also expressed using some of the same words: "For without want there Could be no Enjoyments, but all Redundancies and Superfluities," *SM*. III. 79.

[284] Sharon Seelig, *The Shadow of Eternity: Belief and Structure in Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1981. introduction, i.

Then there is, in the phrase 'want like a God', that little indefinite article which may be troublesome. "You must Want like *a* GOD" -- perhaps Traherne is not identifying our wanting with the wanting of 'the one' God at all. After all, just three meditations previously he has also written, "He made us Want like *GODS*"[285] plural. But no, despite the variant forms of the term 'God' which Traherne employs, it is not *any* or *some various* gods to which Traherne likens the desiring human, since in the very next sentence he deliberately distinguishes between "The Heathen Dieties" who "wanted nothing, and were therfore unhappy; For they had no Being" and "the LORD GOD of Israel the Living and True GOD... from all Eternity"[286]. Clearly then, for Traherne the God of our 'wanting' is understood in the monotheistic tradition of a Judeo-Christian God. The indefinite article and the plural are attached to the desiring humans not the god whose wanting they replicate.

And what about this action or state of God *wanting*? Traherne admits that the notion of a wanting God is "very strange" since "in Him is the Fulness of all Blessedness".[287] And yet, it is in the same meditation in which Traherne writes, "For in Him is the fulness of all Blessedness : He overfloweth Eternaly", that he also claims "He is from *Eternity full* of Want"[288]. Not only is God's wanting full and eternal, it is also glorious. For Traherne,

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[285] C. I. 44, C. I. 41. (Italics mine)

[286] Ibid.

[287] *C*.I.42. cf. *SM*. III. 82 "God is a Fulness in all Extremes:"

[288] *C*.I.42. (italics mine; to be *full* of *want* itself something of a paradox).

God's wanting is the source of his joy since "Infinit Want is the very Ground and Cause of infinit Treasure" and "Infinit Wants Satisfied produce infinit Joys;"[289]. According to Traherne, it is this very 'wanting' in the heart of God that instigated creation. "He Wanted the Communication of His Divine Essence, and Persons to Enjoy it. He Wanted Worlds, He wanted Spectators, He wanted Joys, He wanted Treasures."[290] Ultimately, according to Traherne, he wanted us. Creatures, and the created world[291]. And so God's wanting is the source of our existence and therefore not only the root of God's treasure and joy, but also a "treasure"[292] to us.

All of these assertions are underpinned by two beliefs Traherne held concerning God's wanting. The first is that God's wanting is essentially passionate, that is to say that God's passion is an expression of God's essence. The second is that, for Traherne, need in God is always about capacity.

Traherne sees God's nature and God's act as inextricably linked[293]. The best does the best. The infinite acts infinitely. And God's infinite life, which is infinite in fervour as

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[289] *C*.I.42 - 43.

[290] C. I. 41.

[291] C. IV. 75. Having created the world, "He desired som one that might Weigh and reason, lov the Beauty, and admire the Vastness of so Great a Work."

[292] "Want in GOD is a Treasure to us." (*C*.I.42.).

[293] Of course Traherne is not alone in this. Along with others, Aquinas also linked God's being to act. But for him, God is wholly active and so cannot have any potentiality in him. See Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. p. 122.

well as extent, results in action that is likewise infinite in both extent and fervour[294]. When thinking of the fervour of God's act one is not only reminded of the perfection of his action in creation as set out in *The Kingdom of God*[295], but also of the passionate God described in "Affection", and mentioned earlier, whose "Sweetness and Ardor, Zeal and Violence, Excess of Lov," is the reason why he "Woes, grievs, Fears and doth lament, hopes, covets and is discontent". In both the human soul and in God, an abatement of passion is seen as polluting: "Lukewarmness is Profane" we are reminded in *Christian Ethicks*, "to be beloved Lukewarmly is to be embraced with polluted and filthy armes."[296]. For Traherne, the link between passion and perfection means that did God love us any less, that abatement of ardour would be as damaging to his purity as actual evil.

> "The fervor of his Lov, and the extrem Ardor of his desire, wherwith he is carried to Infinit perfection, is his real puritie: the lov of evil, or the Abatement of his Affection to the Best of things, or the slackness of his endeavor and Desire, any of these had been like Dross in his Brightness; Admixtures of unprofitable Dirt,"[297].

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[294] Interestingly, the human soul is also described as being two ways infinite -- infinite in extent and excellency. (*C*.II.83).

[295] See *KOG* chapters 3, 5, 8,and 6.; but in this last, Traherne also asserts that creation, however perfect, is empty -- a nest without a bird , a temple without a deitie -- without the omnipresence of God. (*KOG* 167r-v). The wonder of creation is also, of course, a major theme of the *Centuries*, and appears in most of Traherne's works.

[296] *CE*. p. 89.

[297] *KOG* 205r. Traherne makes a similar link between passion and perfection in his chapter on holiness in *Christian Ethicks*: "For infinite Goodness must needs desire with an infinite violence, that all Goodness should be compleat and Perfect: and that Desire, which makes to the Perfection of all Goodness, must infinitely avoid every slur and Miscarriage as unclean:... It cannot desire less then infinite Perfection, nor less then hate all Imperfection, in an infinite Manner." (*CE*. p. 88)

So it is that the human soul too is considered sullied by any inferior expression of love. "He that can submit to an Inferior degree of Lov, or take up with a Smaller Measure in the Deitie, is a degenerat person," Traherne writes, "Who infinitely desireth,... he only is a truly Sublime, and Generous Soul, that is Worthy of God.[298].

Not only should we desire God ardently, but we should also ardently expect perfection in God. To expect less is not modesty but cowardice, according to Traherne. "Neither will any pretence serve the turn to cover our cowardice, which we call modesty, in not daring to say or expect this [perfection] of the Deity. Unless we expect this with infinite ardency, we are a lazy kind of creatures good for nothing. 'Tis man's holiness and glory to desire absolute perfection in God"[299]. Just as man's holiness is here identified by the ardency of his desire, so God's holiness too is seen in the ardency of his hatred of profaneness and love of righteousness[300]. These are, for Traherne, a perfection in his action.

That God's actions must be perfect is a well maintained theological premise. And that God is all act has been asserted again and again. Traherne agrees that doing nothing is an

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[298] *KOG* 167r-167v. cf. "*Lukewarmness* is Profane" (*CE*. p88-89).

[299] *C.* II. 83. Just as man's holiness is here identified by the ardency of his desire, so God's holiness too is seen by Traherne as connected with the fervour of his love.

[300] "The infinite Excess of his Eternal Goodness is its own Holiness,...FOR infinite Goodness must needs desire with an infinite violence," (CE p. 87, 88). The passionate nature of God's holiness is suggested in the title of this 12th chapter in *Christian Ethicks*: "Of Holiness: Its Nature, and Violence, and Pleasure. Its Beauty consistent in the infinite Love of Righteousness and Perfection."

evil associated with death, whereas in God there is all life[301]. And he upholds the importance of the premise that God is perfect act[302]; but whereas others may emphasise the utter completion of that perfection, the thing that often interests Traherne, is exploring the quality of the action itself that makes it perfect."What may we think is the Life of God? Is not to Live, and to be doing neer akin?" he writes, and then he continues, "Verily the Best of Lives. ... Certainly therfore he is doing allwayes the best of all possible things. And not only so, but doing them in the best of All possible Manners, that is at once doing , seeing and enjoying them."[303]. This perfect divine act is, for Traherne, a natural result of both the infinite extent and infinite fervour of the life of God. "Infinit Life is Infinit in Extent, and In Fervor, and is Infinitly carried to infinit Actions.", he writes. Creation is thus the result of God's desire -- "all things allure him to make them, and to make them perfect."[304]. This is inevitable since "The Best of all efficient Causes [that is God] cannot be remiss in Acting... An Infinit Efficient proceeds in an Infinit Manner to an Infinit End, and will not dishonor the Glory of that End, it aspires

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[301] see *KOG* 205r. See also *C.* II. 22. in which activity and motion are associated with life.

[302] see for instance, "GOD is a Being whose Power from all Eternity was prevented with Act. And that He is One infiniteAct of KNOWLEDGE and *Wisdom*," (*C.* II. 84.); Motion alone is not enough to indicate life, since a watch may have motion but does not live. According to Traherne there must be "lively motions, and sensible desires" by which we breathe, see, feel, grow, flourish, know and love. (*C.* II. 22.) It may be interesting to note that the human soul too becomes "all Act" in Heaven. (see *C.* II. 73.; *C.* II. 75.)

[303] *KOG* 205r-v.

[304] This and the previous quote are from *KOG* 205v.

after, by obscure, and scanty endeavors."[305] . Again, a page later, Traherne reiterates: "Look upon His Holiness, it is the Hatred of Profaneness..." and a love of righteous actions which God cares about passionately, even though as "a free Agent, he might possibly hav forborn" to care so much. "...but he was caried to the utmost height of all possible Glory with a Desire enflamed with infinit Beauty and with such zeal preferred the most excellent things [abov all others] that he would not for all Worlds, hav swerved one hairs breadth from that Mark of Perfection"[306]. God's fervour then, is an expression of his essential perfection. By desire he is carried to glory; without his zeal his holiness would be hollow. Traherne goes further. What is true of divine holiness is also true of divine blessedness and goodness and love. Every way you look God's essence requires an infinite expression: "look upon his Blessedness, it must hav Infinit Treasures; upon his Goodness, it must be infinitly communicated; upon his Lov, it must be infint in fervor"[307].

Likewise, his actions must be infinite in extent. The infinite extent of God's action has been alluded to earlier in this chapter -- that realm of infinite space, which is the theatre of divine action, being an infinite capacity to answer his power. For although God's omnipresence and omnipotence, when they are exercised, are always exercised fully, they

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[305] *KOG* 203v.

[306] *KOG* 204r. It may be interesting to note that Traherne's God retains the power of choice. Although God is acting according to his essence in zealously desiring perfection, Traherne wants to make it clear that he need not do so. The importance of choice in Traherne will be discussed more fully in chapter four.

[307] *KOG* 203v.

are also always full of greater capacity. Like infinite space, for Traherne, God's act is at once full and capacious -- at once effecting and leaving room for all things.[308] A divine act that leaves room may seem like a contradiction in terms since it seems not like 'perfect act' at all, but like an imperfect or incompleted act. Yet, for Traherne, God's exercise of capacity is not about emptiness but action. Capacity is a "Passive Power" and so to exercise capacity is to act. Traherne asserts: "he made capacities for for his Essence, and Passive Powers, that might answer his Activ Omnipotence."[309]. I believe that this issue of capacity keeps recurring in Traherne because of the centrality of desire in his scheme of things. However perfectly in extent or fervour God or the human acts, there is always potential for more, and where there is potential there is desire. Traherne says of God: "All that he saw his Omnipresence and eternitie capable of, invited him unto them. His own Wisdom and Power allured him: So did the Hallelujahs, and Praises of all his Creatures. His own Goodness pricked him on: and the utmost Heights being most desirable, were most pleasing."[310]. Here it is God's own capacity that urges creation. This echoes those meditations in the *Centuries* in which Traherne claims that God needed to create the world. All that he wanted he had from eternity and so we may see God's wanting as a choice, his needing as an expression not of lack, but of desire. For there must be innumerable means for the satisfaction of innumerable capacities. It

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[308] "He leaveth Room for, and Effecteth all Things." (*C.* II. 19.) Here Traherne is referring to the physical presence of God, but since, in doing so, he is arguing from God's nature, the point remains.

[309] *KOG* 294v.

[310] *KOG* 205v.

was of God's wisdom that this should be: "It is infinitly Wise therfore to find out infinit Means, whereby to be Infinitly Blessed, Innumerable Means for the Satisfaction of Capacities Innumerable and insatiable"[311].

God's wants are always satisfied. "His Wants are as Glorious as Infinit" writes Traherne, "ever Blessed, becaus always Satisfied."[312]. Since "all Eternity is at once in Him", he wants and has concurrently. From all eternity he "Wanted like a GOD." Traherne continues, "He wanted, yet he wanted not, for he had them."[313]. His wants and enjoyments being always present together, each perfect the other:

> "His Wants are as Lively as his Enjoyments: And always present with Him... He feels them both. His Wants put a Lustre upon His Enjoyments, and make them infinit. His Enjoyments being infinit Crown his Wants, and make them Beautifull even to GOD Himself. His Wants and Enjoyments being always present, are Delightful to each other, stable Immutable Perfectiv of each other, and Delightfull to Him."[314]

The 'lustre' added to his enjoyments may sound superficial, but, God's wants are really the root of his treasure. "He is from Eternity full of Want: Or els He would not be full of Treasure. Infinit Want is the very Ground and Caus of infinit Treasure." insists Traherne, "Want is the Fountain of all His Fulness."[315]. To God it is natural to know his treasures; for us it is something we must learn: "This is a Lesson long enough: which you may be

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[311] *KOG* 204r.

[312] *C.* I. 42.

[313] *C.*I.44, *C.* I. 41.

[314] *C.* I. 44.

[315] *C.* I. 42.

all your Life in Learning, and to all Eternity in Practising. *Be Sensible of your Wants, that you may be sensible of your Treasures.*"[316]

What does it mean then for us to want like God? He wants perfectly in extent and fervour, but this wanting occurs out of fulness into infinity. We want out of a need which, whilst it may remind us of our infinite origin and end, is also rooted in the unchosen but given needs of our finite frames. As Traherne writes in the *Centuries*:

> "Here upon Earth, it [the soul] is under many Disadvantages and Impediments that maim it in its Exercise. But in Heaven it is most Glorious. And it is my Happiness that I can see it on both sides the Vail or Skreen. There it appeareth in all its Advantages, for evry Soul being full and fully satisfied, at Eas, in rest, and Wanting nothing, easily overflows and shines upon all. It is its perfect Interest so to do, and nothing Hinders it...But here it is pinched and straitned by wants: here it is awakend and put in mind of it self: here it is divided and Distracted between two. It has a Body to provide for, necessities to reliev, and a person to supply. Therfore is it in this world the more Glorious, if in the midst of these Disadvantages it exert it self in its Operations."[317]

And yet our needing and wanting can be passionate and prudent, as God's is; it can be perfective and satisfied. That Traherne intends satisfaction for the human soul is in no doubt. This is the very reason why we have been given desire in such generous measure. "You must Want like a GOD *that you may be Satisfied like GOD.*"[318]. And our wanting can be, in a sense, even more profoundly perfective than God's. For whereas God's wants perfect his pleasures, our wants can perfect our selves. Traherne follows his injunction to "*Be Sensible of your Wants, that you may be sensible of your Treasures.*"

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[316] *C.* I. 45.

[317] *C.* IV. 60.

[318] *C.* I. 44. (italics mine). See also "He made us to Want like GODS, that like GODS we might be satisfied." (*C.* I. 41.)

with the asssurance that "He is most like God that is sensible of everything."[319] It would seem then, that learning to want as God wants involves the soul in a profound change -- we become like him and live in his likeness. "Wants are the Bands and Cements between God and us." Traherne asserts, "Wants are the Ligatures between God and us, the Sinews that convey Sences from Him into us: wherby we liv in Him, and feel His Enjoyments."[320]. It is in this sense that wanting like a God is truly transforming.

We may want then, passionately and prudently, in imitation of God, knowing, by our wants, both our need of him and the joy of treasure we receive. We may, like him, experience want as perfective and satisfying. By knowing our wants we may come to know our treasures and enjoy them in full extent and fervour. As Traherne writes:

> "To Enjoy therfore the Treasures of God after the similitud of God is to Enjoy the most perfect Treasures in the most Perfect Maner. Upon which I was infinitly satisfied in God, and knew there was a Dietie, becaus I was Satisfied. For Exerting Himself wholy in atchieving thus an infinit felicity He was infinitly Delightful Great and Glorious, and my Desires so August and Insatiable that nothing less than a Deity could satisfy them."[321].

Traherne's desire, it seems, increased with every satisfaction until, by desires 'August and Insatiable', he was led to the chief treasure which is God himself. This is why he proclaims the virtue of desire -- partly because it is itself a divine quality, but perhaps even more significantly, because it is in the dynamic of desiring that the human soul finds it home and its happiness.

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[319] *C.* I. 45.

[320] *C.* I. 51.

[321] *C.* III. 59.

> "I must lead you out of this, into another World, to learn your Wants. For till you find them you will never be Happy. Wants themselvs being sacred Occasions and Means of Felicitie."[322]

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore the notion of desire in Traherne. As we have seen, desire in Traherne is not primarily about sexual desire although sexual imagery is part of his discussion of power, consent and union in the dynamic of God and the soul, and passion is a part of that dynamic. Desire in Traherne is at its best when it is both excessively passionate and prudent-- that is to say, when the infinite love is matched to an infinite object. Infinity and infinite space are places in which this infinite desire may grow, infinite space being the first thing naturally known along with the desire of 'some Great Thing'. Desire is about stretching into this space with 'infinite aspiration', and so by desiring infinitely we exercise the soul's capacity made in the image of God. Gregory of Nyssa's 'Ever reaching forth' and the 'insatiable stretching forth' of Matar speak eloquently of Trahernean desire's insatiability. They suggest illimited desire -- unbounded, unquenchable, divine in proportion and human in its imagery of hunger and of thirst. This experience of the darker side of desire – want, need, hunger, thirst, dissatisfaction-- is embraced by Traherne, for it is out of this intersection of the finite and the infinite that human insatiability arises, a good which , like infinite space, is an exercise in infinite capacity. Traherne has given us many terms with which to discuss the workings of desire -- hunger, thirst, restless longing, heavenly avarice, prizing, wanting, affection, need, ardour, fervour, amongst others. The simple word 'want' is the word I favour since its ambiguities seem to have been appreciated and employed by Traherne

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[322] *C.* I. 43.

and since it implies both sides of desire -- the side which looks out towards the infinite, and the side that feels the limitations of the finite. Most of all desire is divine, we are to desire as God desires -- with full fervour and extent, experiencing satisfaction and perfection as wants become "Sacred Occasions and Means of Felicity".

Chapter 3: Seeing our Treasures

What is Treasure?

What does it mean to learn our wants? This is an important question since Traherne claims we will never be happy until we find them, our wants being the means of felicity. Just as a picture needs shadow if the objects depicted in it are to be three-dimensional, so felicity, if it is to be fully rounded, must have its shadow of want. Want is what makes felicity real. "As Pictures are made Curious by Lights and Shades, which without Shades could not be: so is Felicitie composed of Wants and Supplies, without which Mixture there could be no Felicity."[323] writes Traherne. This play of wanting and having, of light and shadow, is not only the experience of the earthbound human who needs and has and needs again. It is also heavenly. In Heaven, want is not the enemy but the envoy of happiness; in fact, heavenly treasure could not exist without it: Traherne's want is "the Parent of Celestial Treasure." He goes further: "Want it self is a Treasure in Heaven : And so Great an one, that without it there could be no reasure."[324]. Traherne's God himself is full of want "or els He would not be full of Treasure." So in Heaven and in earth, "Infinite want is the very ground and cause of infinite treasure." Repeatedly Traherne admits that this is strange. "It is Incridible," he writes here,

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[323] *C.* I. 41. Traherne says the same thing in very similar words in *Select Meditations*: "For as pictures are made by a pleasant Admixture of lights and shades so is Happines compleated by a fulness and variety of wants and Treasures." (*SM* III. 79).

[324] This and preceding quote *C.*I.41.

"yet very Plain: Want is the Fountain of all His Fulness."[325] That want and fulness play against each other so happily in Traherne is a reflection of his belief in the possibility of and hope of satisfaction. Wherever want is signalled in Traherne, satisfaction is implied, and that satisfaction can only be as full as the want it answers. So it is that our capacity for infinite desire is a gift rather than a curse: "GOD did infinitly for us, when He made us to Want like GODS, that like GODS, we might be satisfied."[326]

These satisfactions never cloy. God who is immutable and eternal, enjoys all his wants and treasures together, his wants and satisfactions being, as we have seen earlier, "Delightfull to each other" and "Perfectiv of each other". His wants are delightful to him. "His Wants never Afflict Him, His Treasures never Disturb Him. His Wants always Delight Him; His Treasures never Cloy Him." This sounds like a kind of painless wanting quite unlike the kind of wanting we experience, and yet says Traherne, "The Sence of His Wants is always as Great, as if His treasures were removed : and as lively upon Him."[327] It is this very sense of want that causes treasure to be treasure, "for nothing without the want of it could be a Treasure"[328].

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[325] This and the preceding three quotes are from *C.* I. 42. Similarly, in the previous meditation he writes: "It is very strange". In *SM* he again points out this apparent anomaly when he writes that want and enjoyment "infinitly agree while they seem to differ". (*SM* II. 79).

[326] *C.* I. 41. See also *C.* I. 43 and 44 in which satisfaction is assumed to be the outcome of desire.

[327] This and the preceding quote are from *C.* I. 44.

[328] See *KOG* 361r Here he also writes that God found it "requisite to multiply our Wants, that our Treasures might be multiplied,".

Traherne is unashamed of his apparently insatiable desire for treasure. So familiar is the theme that some readers have become embarrassed by his catalogues of booty. Thrones, sceptres, crowns, gold, silver, kingdoms -- these are the prizes of his happy men and women[329]. Treasure marks the heavenly path and the heavenly prize. Traherne's man "cannot rest without a Clear and apparent Treasure"[330], he insists; since where there is no "desire of Treasure there can be no Sence of felicitie"[331]. "Objectiv Treasures are always Delightfull... to see them all our own is infinitly Pleasant:" he writes in the *Centuries* as he praises the "Avaricious Humor" by which we desire that treasure be wholly ours[332]. In his poem "Desire", Feasts, Honors, Imperial Treasures, and living pleasures are the things for which Traherne yearns. It would seem that Traherne takes for his own the biblical text "In thy presence there is fulness of Joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures forever more."[333] Certainly treasure, pleasure and feasting are a part of his heavenly vision. In one instance Traherne turns even fasting into pleasure since the faster's increased desire

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[329] See, for instance, the kinds of rewards given to the bride in *KOG* and in *L*: See also the poetry in which heaven is described in terms of feasting and treasure: "The Soul is present by a Thought; and sees/ The New Jerusalem, the Palaces,/ The Thrones and feasts, the Regions of the Skie,/ The Joys and Treasures of the DEITIE." ... "His Dwelling place is full of Joys and Pleasures/ His Throne a fountain of Eternal Treasures." ll. 9-12 and 81-82 of "Thoughts IV". See also "Wonder" in which the wealth of early innocence is described in terms of conventional treasure: "Rich Diamond and Pearl and Gold/ In evry Place was seen..."

[330] *KOG* 152r. This whole third chapter is about the treasures in the world.

[331] *Seeds of Eternity* 135v. See also *C*.II.14: "You are never truly Great till all the World is yours:"

[332] *C*.II.79. Here the avaricious humour and the communicative humour go hand in hand – cf. note 251.

[333] Cf. "Thoughts IV" which begins with these very words. See also *C*. II.100.

heightens the pleasure of treasure attained so that fasters may be the greatest epicures[334]. Is this a picture of Traherne the greedy, Traherne the glutton, the epicure, the sensualist, the gourmand? Not at all. This is Traherne the paradoxical, for his 'treasures'are not as straightforward as they seem. For Traherne, treasure is wholly one's own whilst at the same time being everyone else's too[335]. His "Thrones", "sceptres", "crowns", "feasts", "palaces" and "pleasure", may be images of false or true treasure. When they are gifts bestowed rather than treasures sought, they speak of divine authority and benevolence. God is king; humankind is royal; the heavens and earth are the endless expanse of his kingdom filled with infinite treasure[336]. And this infinite treasure is composed of the most common things. "The most excellent things are most common"[337] Traherne asserts, "and they are not understood "becaus they are Great Common, and Simple"[338]. Whilst sceptres, crowns and thrones are useful to Traherne as symbols of power and glory, they are never the treasure we are to seek. To seek them is to seek in error, and yet to seek treasure is not wrong. The question is what we are seeking.

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[334] "A Vertuous man is more covetous, more Ambitious, more prone to Celestial Epicurisme, if I may so speak, than all the World besides;" (*CE* p.285).

[335] Thus, by "the most Delightfull Accident Imaginable" (*C*.II.79) his treasures satisfy two opposite humours at once -- the avaricious humour and the communicative humour -- in an economy of gift and receipt which will be explored more fully in chapter five of this thesis.

[336] This is the presupposition underlying the whole of *KOG*.

[337] *KOG* 266v. See also 268v.

[338] *C*.II.16.

Riches, the treasures perhaps most commonly sought, are discussed in the fourth *Century* in which Traherne makes it clear that riches are only useful as the servant of happiness. "Riches are but servants to Happiness, when they are Impediments they ceas to be Riches" he writes. "When we see the Persuit of them destructiv to Felicity, to desire them is of all things in Nature the most absurd and the most foolish."[339]. "It more concernes me to be Divine, then to have a Purs of Gold." he insists; therefore we should dig for wisdom and mine happiness.

> " Is it not the shame and reproach of Nature, that men should spend so much time in studying Trades, and be so ready skild in the Nature of clothes, of Grounds, of Gold and Silver,&tc. and think it much to spend a little time, in the study of God, Themselvs, and Happiness?"[340]

Later in the same *Century* he considers the value of desiring riches for the sake of others- - either that they should have riches themselves or that he should have them to give away- - and concludes that for himself, it is as well not to have them in the first place and for his friends: "He desired no other Riches for his friends, but those which cannot be Abused: to wit the True Treasures, God and Heaven and Earth and Angels and Men, &tc. with the Riches of Wisdom and Grace to enjoy them."[341] Perhaps this is because Traherne has discerned that wealth makes men vulnerable: "The costly Delicate[s] we have invented

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[339] *C.* IV.10.

[340] This and the preceding quote are from *C.* IV. 7.

[341] *C.*IV.35. see also *C.* IV. 32-37.

have made us miserable. we must needs be as Gods, and by creating Riches of our own devising made work for Robbors."[342]

The clear implication here is that heavenly treasures will not so disappoint. Traherne admonishes his reader to:

> "See the difference between pure, Intelligent, spotless pleasures, and those Sordid, foul Abominations that allure the Wicked; between Angelicall and Swinish Delights, feeble Enjoyments, and Eternal rewards; Hypocritical Embroyderies, and Solid Realities; fading Transitory Joys, and everlasting possessions; Earthly and Heavenly Treasures."[343]

One may imagine these heavenly treasures to be invisible and infinite, and indeed some of them are. The second *Century* tells us that God has made treasures for us infinite in both extent and excellency[344]. Eternity and infinity are two examples of such infinite treasure[345]. In *Select Meditations*, he speaks of the virtues as invisible treasures: "Consider, and well understand, that Among invisible Things vertues are the fairest,...becaus they are the Interiour Treasures of the Soul,"[346]. He goes on to discuss Wisdom, Prudence, Courage, Justice, Temperance, and the theological virtues of Faith, Righteousness, Holiness and Humility as invisible treasures[347]. And in the third *Century*

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[342] *SM.* III. 12. Similarly in the *Centuries* the "Riches of Darkness", "those which Men hav made, during their Ignorance of God Almightie's Treasures" are the things which "lead us from the Lov of all, to...fals Proprieties, Insatiable Longings, fraud, Emulation, Murmuring and Dissension...Theft and Pride and Danger, and Cousenage Envy and Contention" (*C*.I.33).

[343] *KOG* 152v.

[344] *C*.II.83.

[345] See Traherne's discussion of eternity and infinity in the fifth *Century*.

[346] *SM* IV.55.

[347] *SM* IV.54-68 (end).

"Common, but Invisible" treasures are "The Laws of God, the Soul of Man, Jesus Christ and His Passion on the Crosse, with the Ways of GOD in all Ages."[348]

But heavenly virtues are not necessarily so completely otherworldly. The human is made "to Enjoy By his Soul the Eternity of God, with all the invisible Treasures of his spiritual kingdom," [349] but, at the same time, "This visible World is Wonderfully to be Delighted in, and Highly to be Esteemed"[350]. Man is "by his Body meet to Enjoy all the Materials of the created world."[351]. Many times over Traherne writes of the beauty of the earthly treasures of this physical world:

> "The Skies and the Rivers, the sun and the stars, the Beauty of the world, their Dominion over Beasts and Fowls and Fishes, the Dignity of their Nature and the Image of God which none could Deface, but each man Himselfe; these were permanent and stable Treasures:"[352]

Here, as elsewhere, it is the world in its prelapsarian state to which Traherne is referring[353]. And yet, that paradise, though lost, may again be found. All who will may enjoy the earth as treasure still: "To return to the Living waters, and leave sophisticat puddles, is to Returne to the simple Treasures of Eden,... The Treasures of Eden are

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[348] *C*.III.54.

[349] *SM* III.95.

[350] *C*.II.97.

[351] *SM*.III.95. See also *KOG* chapters 40-41 on the importance of the body and its being made for pleasures on earth and in heaven. The human body is "the Darling of the Whole Creation" (*KOG* 355r) a vessel fit for treasure (*KOG* 352v).

[352] *SM* III. 12. The earth as a stable treasure and creation as treasure are also found in "Thoughts IV"

[353] Or the world seen through innocent eyes -- see, for example, the famous "The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat..." of C. III.3. as well as *KOG* 261v.

Simple and Divine: Simple, but Illust[r]ious; Necessary; magnificent, Great; and Glorious."[354]

These simple, great and illustrious treasures of Eden are not just elemental treasures of earth and air and water, of sun and sky -- they are skin too, and tissue and all living things, energies and organisms from atom to Adam. Traherne is aware that in praising such treasures, he is calling his reader to an unconventional reading of the word. In his poem "The Person" he first suggests the conventional treasures of crown, scarlet, gold and then promises to "glorify by taking all away."[355]

> "The Naked Things.
> Are most Sublime,"[356]

he asserts, and then, in gruesome detail, Traherne goes on:

> "Survey the Skin, cut up the Flesh, the Veins
> Unfold: The Glory there remains.
> The Muscles, Fibres, Arteries and Bones
> Are better far then Crown and precious Stones."[357]

So it is that the simple thing is the most valued, the functional is beautiful, the fundamental and elemental is glorious. "The Naked Things/ Are most Sublime" he has claimed; nakedness is praised in the *Centuries* as well: "A Naked Man is the Richest Creature in all Worlds, and can never be Happy; till he sees the Riches of his

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[354] *SM* III. 13.

[355] "The Person" l 16.

[356] "The Person", l. 17-18,

[357] Ibid. l. 29-32. Similarly the limbs of children are sacred treasures: "Their organized Joynts, and Azure Veins/ more Wealth include, then all the World contains." l. 23-24 of "The Salutation".

Nakedness."[358] Nature, too, like humankind, is best undressed: "The Air is Better, being a living Miracle as it now is, then if it were Cramd and fild with Crowns and Scepters. The Mountains are better then Solid Diamonds"[359]. That earth is better in its baseness than gold is stated in *The Kingdom of God* when Traherne writes: "The Earth is generaly reputed to be a Globe of Dirt, the very Dregs of Nature, and the basest of all the elements, yet is it comparable to the fine Gold, if not a Work incomparably more Divine, and excellent."[360]. In many other similar expressions, the conventional treasures of crowns, sceptres, jewels and gold are superceded as Traherne turns on its head the received wisdom of what is real treasure and what is not.

This task of discerning real from imagined treasure is a serious concern for Traherne. It is the principal question behind his writings on 'custom' in the *Centuries* and in his poems[361] and it occurs again many of his other works. Real treasures may be things here

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[358] *C*.IV. 36. In this context Traherne is considering the riches of Adam in Paradise. See also *C*. III.12 in which "They that go Naked and Drink Water and liv upon Roots are like Adam, or Angels in Comparison of us....But We pass them in Barbarous Opinions, and Monstrous Apprehensions: which we Nick Name Civility, and the Mode, amongst us. I am sure those Barbarous People that go naked, come nearer to Adam God and Angels: in the Simplicity of their Wealth,"

[359] *C*.II.12. See also *KOG* 261v: "I knew a Stranger upon Earth that in his Infancy thought the Heavens more sublime then saphires, and the Stones in the streets more pleasant then fine Gold. The fields laden with delights, more rich then Carbuncles, and the meadows more divine then if covered with Emeralds..." Here Traherne's reflections mirror the well-known meditations from the third *Century* (*C*.III.1-3).

[360] *KOG* 261v. The first words of the title of chapter 25 (from which this is taken) suggest both the baseness and the beauty of the earth: "Of the Globe of the Earth. Its baseness, its litleness, its Dignity, its Glory...."

[361] See, for instance, *C*.III.7-13., "Innocence", "Right", Silence", "Apostacy", "Dissatisfaction". False treasures are discussed in "Infant-ey", "Adam", "Inference I", "Eden".

on earth or things heavenly. They may be finite or infinite, visible or invisible. What then are the criteria for discerning real treasure? Traherne gives us a clue when he writes that the best things are misunderstood because they are "Great Common and Simple"[362]. As he explains further in the third *Century*:

> "it is most Consonant and Agreeable with His Nature, that the Best Things should be most Common. for nothing is more Naturall to infinit Goodness, then to make the Best Things most frequent; and only Things Worthless, Scarce. Then I began to Enquire what Things were most Common: Air, Light, Heaven and Earth, Water, the Sun, Trees, Men and Women, Cities, Temples &c. These I found Common and Obvious to all : Rubies Pearls Diamonds Gold and Silver; these I found scarce, and to the most Denied. Then began I to consider and compare the value of them, which I measured by their Serviceableness, and by the Excellencies which would be found in them, should they be taken away. And in conclusion I saw clearly, that there was a Real Valuableness in all the Common things; in the Scarce, a feigned."[363]

Again, in *The Kingdom of God,* he writes that it befits God's goodness "to make the best things most common: And those are best, that are most serviceable:"[364]. For Traherne, real treasure is judged by its commonness, its usefulness and its simplicity.

A drop of water is seen to be the fruit of earth's labour. Melted, distilled, presented in abundance to match our need, drops of water are "transparent and living gems" which we despise because we have them. Justly, says Traherne, may we be "cast into the lake, where we shall prize them eternaly becaus we have them not."

> "You see heaven and Earth, and Sea, conspiring together to make a Drop of Water. It is not the less precious, becaus there is so much of it, it is the more to be esteemed. The most excellent things, are the most common."[365]

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[362] *C.*II.16

[363] *C.* III. 53.

[364] *KOG* 268r-v. See also *SM.* II.88 in which treasures are " soe freely Given, so Reall, common, near," and "necessary yet common, Divine and Glorious, yet freely surrounding us:".

[365] This and the preceding two quotes are from *KOG* 266v.

Simple and common, water is also a treasure because is "serviceable" and "satisfies Necessitie" [366]. Just as the useful, common and simple things are the highest treasures, so also, the small is great: "For GOD, that is Great in all things, and not small in any, is infinitly great in the smallest Thing."[367]

Let us go to that smallest of treasures, the atom. So prized a treasure is the atom, that Traherne's discussion of it spans more than 10 folios of *The Kingdom of God* [368], describing the atom as "an infinit work, ... a sacred and ineffable mysterie... a temple of his omnipresence, ... a gift of his Lov, a work of his wisdom, a means of our happiness, and engine of his Glory."[369] Amongst other features, he admires its smallness, beauty, power, weakness, its ubiquitous nature, its incorruption, volatility and capabilities. The atom is described as "being infinitly small and simple"[370], something that "notwithstanding its commonness, ought to be infinitly esteemed"[371] since "The Glory of all these Atoms is , that they are infinitly usefull."[372]. Once again, Traherne's three defining qualities of treasure -- simplicity, commonness and utility-- appear.

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[366] Ibid.

[367] *KOG* 253r

[368] *KOG* 217r-222v

[369] *KOG* 218r-218v.

[370] *KOG* 218v.

[371] *KOG* 218r.

[372] *KOG* 221r.

Traherne's world is full of given treasure, but there is a treasure too which becomes treasure through the process of redemption. Traherne writes of his happy man: "Thus He was Possessor of the whole World, and held it his Treasure, not only as the Gift of GOD, but as the Theatre of Virtues" -- a place in which the human soul may discover its worth and the worth of others. As Traherne writes, "They are our true Treasures about whom we are wisely Employed."[373] In this sense, even "disorders" may be treasure to us given to us to improve[374]. We may become God's treasures by living in virtue, and when we fail, "Yet he returneth, and maketh up his Treasures by a Surmounting wisdom"[375]. So we become ourselves, living treasure[376].

An Economy of Need and Treasure:

Traherne writes on several occasions of a kind of double economy of need and treasure. He calls it 'valu and interest', or 'worth and interest', 'interest and treasure'. By the one we long to see the excellency of a thing (its value), by the other we long to see it our own (our interest). By the one we see the simplicity, commonness and utility of a thing, by the other we feel its usefulness to us. The first seems disinterested, the second covetous,

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[373] This and the precedng quote are from *C.* IV. 39.

[374] SM.IV.54.

[375] SM III. 51. We become treasures to God by our actions in C.IV. 95 as well. Conversely in the second *Century* (II.30) we become "an unlovely object" by our sin. This seems to contradict Traherne's principle of the inestimable worth of the human soul which would suggest that we are treasures regardless of our actions.

[376] On being oneself a treasure see *SM.* II. 23-29. We are treasures to him and to other souls. See *SM.* IV 50; *C.* IV. 53.

and yet the two are tied together for Traherne. Consider that greatest of treasures, the soul as discussed in *Seeds of Eternity*:

> "Two things ther are concurring [together] to make the Contemplation of the Soul delightful; its own Worth, and our Interest. for as we naturaly desire to see Things excellent, and most violently long for things infinitly so; [So] we likewise ardently covet to have them ours,...we could wish our Interest as infinit as their Excellency. And tho these two Desires are inclinations generaly supprest, either through fear, or some tacite Neglect yet when we remove the impediment that covers them, ...we cannot chuse but feel them, becaus they are parts of our very selves,"[377]

This desiring, which is at once disinterested and covetous, is a necessary part of felicity:

> "For this cause [felicity] God so implanted these two Desires that they are the Occasion of all our Joys even in Heaven, or of all our Torments in Hell. for the Delight of Heaven ariseth from the satisfaction of these two, and the Misery of hell from their frustration."[378]

And without it nothing can be truly apprehended. In *Select Meditations* Traherne asserts: "Nothing can truly be Appr[e]hended but it must needs be Aprehended as Treasure and Inter[e]st."[379] and again:

> "Things are never profitably apprehended, till they are apprehended under the [Double] Notion of Interest & Treasure. Did God apprehend them to be of no valu, & to be none of his; they would be uselesse before him. As they are meer Objects of Speculation, they are Air: but as they are Enjoyments & possessions they feed us with Pleasure, increas our Grandure, unite us unto God."[380]

To call this relationship an 'economy' of need and treasure, as I have done, may be in some sense misleading. For there is nothing impersonal about the balance between

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[377] *SE*, 135v

[378] *SE*, 135v. This double economy is also seen as foundational in *The Kingdom of God* when Traherne writes of divine goodness: "Its valu and our Interest in it are the sole reason of all Obedience, nay of all Law, as well as Duty and Desire." (*KOG* 207r). The basis of all law is that the best should be desired (*KOG* 204v) and this marriage of value and interest is one way of recognising what is best.

[379] *SM*. III. 6.

[380] *ITR*, 13r. Note again the treasure becomes treasure as it is enjoyed and used and that there is no disparity between our enjoying the pleasure of this treasure and our being united with God.

treasure needed and treasure available in Traherne. Jordan uses the term "logic of relationships" to describe Traherne's fascination with the uses and services of objects, or what I might call treasures. That treasure is dependent upon communication and relation is absolutely fitting in Traherne's scheme of things, and we shall consider communication in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis. Here it may suffice to note, with Jordan, that in this logic of relationship, a balance is always maintained "between wants and supplies within God's creation, the relationships of men to God and to each other, and the harmonious nature of the universe."[381]. And yet there is more than balance in the dynamic of need and treasure; there is generation and regeneration as well. For God would not make "(nor create any thing but to answer some Exigent and necessity conceived by Him)"[382]. The need is conceived and then the treasure created, thus the economy of need and treasure underlies all of creation, and by it new treasures are continually made. God did "multiply the Treasures of his Eternal Kingdom by wants and supplies. Had there been noe creatures made that could need the sun, the sun could never hav been made a Treasure: nor could God frame a sea, but first he must conceive a Person needing it: Air to them that need no breath, nor open liberty, nor Bodily Refreshment, would be superfluous and made in vain;" etc.[383]. The implication is that wherever a new need arises a new treasure is waiting to be formed. So may treasure multiply as need produces fresh outlets for divine bounty.

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[381] Jordan, "Thomas Traherne and the Art of Meditation", *JHI.* 46:3(1985): 381-403. p. 400.

[382] *SM.* III. 8.

[383] *SM* III. 9.

Another way of understanding need with regard to treasure is to see the particular need as the locus of each treasure. Each thing valued for its place:

> "That any thing may be found to be an infinit Treasure, its Place must be found in Eternity, and in Gods Esteem. For as there is a Time, so there is a Place for all Things. Every thing in its Place is Admirable, Deep, and Glorious: out of its Place like a Wandering Bird, is Desolat and Good for Nothing. How therfore it relateth to God and all Creatures must be seen before it can be Enjoyed....Divest it of these Operations, and Divide it from these Objects it is Useless and Good for nothing. And therfore Worthless, because Worthless and Useless go together."[384]

Again, the object's relation to its place, its capacity for answering a specific need, is what ascribes worth. In these terms only, the traditional 'treasures' of gold, silver and precious stones may have real, though limited, value -- these 'false' treasures may be deemed real treasures because their abundance is in proportion to their use. In a typically paradoxical twist, in which they are valued and devalued at the same time, it is their very scarcity rather than their commonness that makes these particular things treasures, scarcity limiting their availability since their usefulness is likewise limited:

> "The Wisdom of God is exceeding marvellous, that made these [minerals, metals, precious stones and jewels] so secure: the Abundance and Plenty of them being proportionable to their use. For had he made them common, he had made them vile, which are now made Treasures by their Scarcity...becaus their Abundance would Exceed the uses to which they are capable of being applied."[385]

It is because everything has a place, however limited, that everything may ultimately be a treasure[386]. Treasure satisfies want -- that is to say a desire or a need -- and the loftier and

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[384] *C.*III.55.

[385] *KOG* 268r. These things may be treasure, but they are still more limited, by their relative uselessness, than the common treasure of air and water and sunlight etc.

[386] That it is possible for anything to be a treasure is affirmed in the third *Century* where Traherne's study of the common invisible treasures led him back to everything else: "But to my unspeakable wonder, they brought me to all the things in Heaven and in Earth, in

larger the want, the greater the treasure. So it is that Traherne could say, "whatsoever satisfied the Goodness of Nature, was the Greatest Treasure."[387] Divine goodness is surrounded by treasure; God's wants and treasures perfecting each other and delighting him. "The Sence of His Wants, as it Enlargeth His Life, so it infuseth a Valu, and continual Sweetness into the Treasures He Enjoyeth."[388]

Traherne's greatest treasures are not riches, but the things that are most simple, common and useful. They may be finite or infinite, earthly or heavenly, but their value is linked to their ability to answer a need rather than their rarity. In this economy of need and treasure each treasure has its place and false treasures cease to have value. The pursuit of true treasure, requiring as it does a clear vision of want and worth, is the road to felicity So Traherne may say with confidence: "the Tru Treasures, those Rivers of Pleasure that flow at his right hand for evermore, are by all to be sought and by all to be desired."[389]

Prizing:

In Traherne's poem "Desire" he praises God for giving him desire, for making him "apt to prize and taste and see", and it is to this word 'prizing' that attention now turns.

Time and Eternity, possible and impossible, great and little, common and scarce; and discovered them all to be infinite treasure." C.I II.54.

[387] *C.* IV.44. Traherne claims that this is a principle at the bottom of nature, the misunderstanding of which causes men to err since all inclinations and desires flow from and towards the satisfaction of goodness. Taken to its logical conclusion, God is his own best treasure. This Traherne states in *CE.* p. 68 -- "God is his own best and most perfect treasure.".

[388] *C.* I.44. As stated earlier, God's wants are chosen rather than given as are ours. Thus Traherne can also say: "he Knows how to enjoy, what he never needed, and to improve his Enjoyments by giving them away." *CE* p. 68.

[389] *C.* II. 100.

Having a clear vision of want and worth is exactly what prizing is about since prizing is knowing a thing and knowing its value and valuing it. This may seem to be an act of intellection and discernment, and it is so. But prizing is also about yearning. It is, if you like, where intellectually discerned treasure meets hot-hearted desire. To prize involves both the intellect and the affections in an act of knowledge and love. It is in this way that prizing makes objective treasure real treasure to the individual. Prizing is also, in some sense a public affair -- it is about upholding as desired and desirable the thing we know to be real treasure.

The seriousness of Traherne's 'prizing' may be better understood by considering his writing on Righteousness. In chapter ten of *Christian Ethicks* he writes: "there is a Righteousness of Apprehension, a Righteousness of Esteem, a Righteousness of Choise, and a Righteousness of Action." Right apprehension,

> "tho it be the First and smallest part of Righteousness, is of Great importance... He that mistakes his Hand for his Meat, will rise hungry from the Table. He that mistakes a Fiddle for an Axe, will neither cut Wood well, not make good Musick. The Misapprehension of Great and Transcendent Objects, whether visible or Spiritual, is not perhaps so Gross, but more pernicious and Destructive."[390]

From this right apprehension, right esteem may follow, and this right esteem, in its correct appreciation of worth, is very like the discernment of real treasure discussed above -- it gives value according to merit and accords everything its right place. Righteousness of esteem is:

> "that Habit, by Vertue of which we value all things according as their Worth or Merit requires. It presupposes a right Apprehension of their Goodness, a clear Knowledge of all their

[390] CE. p.71. see also: "Morneys Simile of the Saw is admirable: If a man would cut with a saw, he must not apprehend it to be a Knife, but a Thing with Teeth; otherwise he cannot use it. He that mistakes his Knife to be an Auger, or his Hand to be his Meat, confounds him self by misapplications." (*C*.IV.15). Right apprehension is the subject of *C*.IV.14-17.

> excellencies. It is a Virtue by which we give to every thing that place in our Soul which they hold in Nature."[391]

Traherne makes bold claims for right esteem seeing it as not only as honouring, but also as perfecting of its objects. In so doing he gives esteem an active role so that esteeming becomes more than a purely intellectual event, but an action whose results, though unquantifiable, are real. This, he admits, is "a little Misterious." [392]. The significant thing to this study is that Traherne seems to be locating act prior to the later two types of righteousness "Righteousness of Choise" and "Righteousness of Action". Or perhaps he is not so much locating act, in esteem, as prior to choice and action, as he is reinforcing the notion that esteem, choice and act are so interdependent that apart from their foundation in esteem, choice and act cannot stand:

> "If it becometh us to fulfil all Righteousness, it becometh GOD, to endue us with the Power of Esteeming all, that is Good Excellent, according to the Worth and Valu thereof.... For this Esteem is the Foundation of that choise which is the Original Spring of all excellent Actions."[393]

It is as if the right esteem out of which right choice and right action flow is inseparable from that choice and action. In fact, in *A Sober View*, prizing is itself is described as "a

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[391] *CE*. p.72. That there should be enough capacity in the soul for all of this is not doubted by Traherne: "There is a Room in the Knowledge for all Intelligible Objects: A Room in our Esteem for all that is worthy of our Care and Desire. I confess this Room is strange and Mysterious. It is the Greatest miracle perhaps in Nature. For it is an infinite Sphere in a Point, an Immensity in a centre, an Etenity in a Moment. We feel it, tho we cannot understand it." (*CE*. p. 73).

[392] *CE*. p. 72. The context reads as follows: "How the Creatures are honoured by esteem, needeth not to be unfolded: but how they are perfected by it, is a little Misterious. A thing is then perfected when it attains its End. Now the end for which all things were made is that they may be seen and enjoyed. They are seen that they may be esteemed,and by and intelligent and right esteem are all enjoyed. In our esteem therefore they find and attain their end, and by attaining that are consequently perfected."

[393] *CE*. p.72.

Righteous Act"[394]. For Traherne, this right apprehension and right esteem is what prizing entails and so we may see that there can be no righteous actions unless we first rightly prize.

Similarly there can be no prizing unless we rightly know. For Traherne knowledge and virtue are bound up together. In *Christian Ethicks* he writes:

> "Knowledge is that which does illuminate the Soul, enkindle Love, excite our Care, inspire the mind with Joy, inform the Will, enlarge the Heart, regulate the Passions, unite all the Powers of the Soul to their Objects, see their Beauty, understand their Goodness, discern our Interest in them, form our Apprehensions of them...All Contentments, Raptures, and Extasies are conceived in the Soul, and Begotten by Knowledge: All Vertues and Graces of the Mind are framed by Knowledge"[395]

Earlier in the same chapter, knowledge, that is the power to understand transformed into act, is perfecting:

> "IF we would *be perfect, as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect*, our Power of Knowing must be transformed (into *Act*,) and all Objects appear in the interior Light of our *own* understanding. For tho all Eternity were full of Treasures, and the Whole World, and all the Creatures in it transformed into Joys and our Interest to all never so perfect; yet it we are Ignorant of them, we shall continue as poor and Empty, as if there were nothing but Vacuity and Space. For not to *be*, and not to *appear*, are the same thing to the understanding."[396]

Here, knowledge is about both perfection and apprehension. And treasures (their worth and our interest) again appear which are made nothing without a mind to know them.

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[394] "To prize God in all his Attributs Works and Ways is to do a Righteous Act for it is to render unto him his Just Esteem." (*SV* 28v).

Similarly, in *Select Meditations*, Traherne says of those actions of apprehension, esteem and love which make up prizing "By Doing this I become Righteous and Holy." (*SM* III.43.).

[395] *CE*. p. 39.

[396] *CE*.p.36-37.

We must know an object before desiring it, as Stewart reminds us in *The Expanded Voice*, "for what a man knows he naturally loves" [397]. This principle is perhaps most profoundly true when applied to the notion of self.[398] "ΓNOΘI ΣEAVTON" Traherne reminds us "becaus in the knowledge of one self, the knowledg of God and all things appeareth."[399] Repeatedly Traherne urges his reader to know the greatness of his own soul[400] and to love the image of God that is written there. "Be venerable to thy Selfe, and Let thy Person be Sacred in thine one Esteem. O Prize thy selfe as thy God prizeth Thee." Traherne writes, so may one be "a Sacred Treasure unto many Thousand others"[401]. "That Pool must first be filled that shall be made to overflow." and so it is that "self Lov is the Basis of all Lov... So that God by satisfying my self Lov, hath enabled, and engaged me to love others."[402] Knowing who we are and what we have is the foundation of our righteous esteem of ourself and others. Sometimes knowing what

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[397] Stewart, *TEV*, p. 63.

[398] "The Knowledge of a Mans self is highly conducive to his Happiness," writes Traherne (*CE*.p.42). And "The principal objects of our Knowledge are GOD, and a Mans self:" There follows a list of secondary objects which "in relation to GOD and a Mans self, are of great Importance." (*CE*.p.41.)

[399] *SE*. 140v. Traherne cites the oracle of Delphi in both 138v and 140v.

[400] "remember always the unsearchable Extent and illimited Greatness of your own Soul" *C*.II.92. See also *C*. IV.48, 50,51, 77, 81.

[401] *SM*.IV.50.

[402] *C*.IV.55. How this love serves others, including how God's self-love overspills to his creatures, is explored at greater length in the subsequent meditations: 56-65

we have lost is as effective: "A Tasted Joy thats lost we more Desire."[403]Traherne reminds us in *The Ceremonial Law*. Nowhere is this more evident than in our appreciation of the full effect of the fall. Traherne admonishes his reader to "*Remember from whence thou art faln, and Repent*. Which intimates our Duty of Remembering our Happiness in the Estate of Innocence. For without this we can never Prize our Redeemers Lov: He that Knows not to what He is redeemed cannot Prize the Work of Redemption."[404]

Perhaps it is because prizing has its roots in knowledge, that it is something that can be taught. Traherne certainly believed that misprizing was a learned fault. "Before I learned to be poor,/ I always did thy Riches see," he writes, in "The Return"[405]. And on many other occasions, especially in the third *Century* he recounts, sometimes with sorrow and sometimes as an admonition, his own lessons in misapprehension and misesteem[406]. But he never loses hope in the possiblity of and belief in the necessity of prizing rightly:

> "A Man should Know the Blessings he enjoyeth. A Man should prize the Blessings which he Knoweth. A Man should be Thankfull for the Benefits which he prizeth. A Man should rejoyce in that for which He is Thankfull. ...yet these are the hard lessons, in a pervers and Retrograde World to be practiced: and almost the only Lessons necessary to its Enjoyment."[407]

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[403] *TCL*, "Elim." l.86.

[404] *C.* II. 5. In the *Kingdom of God* also what is lost is valued: "It is a strange thing that a Blind man should see the valu of his eys, better then one that has sight" (KOG 207v).

[405] ll. 14-15. Similarly, in *SM* he writes: "Till custom and Education had bred the Difference: it was as obvious to me to seel all within us , as It was without." (*SM* III.27).

[406] *C.*III. 7, 8, 9,11,12,13.

[407] *C.* IV.54.

Learning to prize rightly is so important to Traherne because prizing is inextricably tied up with treasure -- "For it is necessary to see our wants, before we can See and Possess our Treasures,"[408] he insists. And when he writes:

> "*I will Prize all I hav: And nothing shall with me be less esteemed, because it is Excellent. A Daily Joy shall be more my Joy, becaus it is continual. A Common Joy is more my Delight becaus it is Common. For all Mankind are my Friends. And evry Thing is Enriched in serving them.*"[409]

we can see once again the characteristics of treasure -- simplicity, commmonness and utility -- represented in his prized things.

But knowledge, that is right apprehension, is not only gained by right intellection. It is also gained by the actual experience of want. In *The Cermonial Law*, Traherne describes the raging thirst of the Israelites in the desert and the blissfull relief they found in Elim as an example of how all people may be taught to "Prize and so Enjoy their Bliss."[410].

It is largely prizing that makes heaven and hell. "To hav Blessings and to Prize them is to be in Heaven; To hav them and not to prize them, is to be in Hell, I would say upon Earth: To prize them and not to hav them, is to be in Hell."[411]. And so prizing has eternal significance. To prize rightly is to prize righteously, to prize righteously is to be involved

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[408] *SM* III. 79.

[409] *C*.IV.17.

[410] *TCL*, "Elim" l.130. "*Joys Possest but Tasteless prov:/* Unless we prize them" Traherne writes (ll.124-125.)

[411] *C*.I.47. See also, the preceding meditation: "For they in Heaven do Prize Blessings when they havethem. They in Earth when they hav them Prize them not, They in Hell Prize them when they hav them not." and the subsequent meditation: "They that would not upon Earth see their Wants from all Eternity, shall in Hell see their Treasures to all Eternity." For more regarding heaven on earth see also *C*. I.83., *SM*.IV.27.

in the business of righteous choices and righteous action; it is to live in heaven even now and to see, esteem and desire the highest and the best.

Right Sight:

In this pursuit of treasure, which is a life lived in desire and in prizing rightly, sight becomes a matter of huge importance. "WHATEVER we close our Eye against, we exclude out of our Knowledge."[412] writes Traherne. Sight is the basis of knowledge and knowledge of prizing and prizing of treasure, treasure the object of desire, desire the engine of felicity; and so, images of the eye, vision, light and sight take on a particular and powerful significance. When he makes a bold claim like: "We need nothing but open Eys, to be Ravished like the Cherubims"[413] all of the ramifications of sight are implied. "Pray for open eyes" Traherne admonishes the reader of *Christian Ethicks*. But these "open Eys" may be less simple then, than they first appear.

This section of the third chapter will attempt to investigate what Traherne means by "open eyes". Traherne's childhood vision will first be examined; his loss of right sight traced; his imagery of light and its connections with 'the divine light' (and with the Cambridge Platonists) explored; and the importance of "open eyes" to the prizing of true treasure noted.

How are we to approach the subject of Traherne's childhood? Those who hold the third *Century* to be autobiographical and take his first person utterances at face value must see

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[412] *CE*.p.73.

[413] *C*.I.37.

Traherne's childhood as the root of all of his work. In it he claims to have had very early direct, pure experiences of beatitude, and all of his best writing is connected with these experiences -- either inspired by them or exploring their implications. It is as if all of his life is *about* these revelations. They are, to him, the standard by which other experience is measured and according to which even matters of doctrine are weighed. This puts him at risk of heresy to some for, although he always seeks to remain within the boundaries set by church tradition and teaching, he cannot deny the validity and force of these early experiences. Then there are those who may question whether or not his memory is reliable, whether or not his experiences were 'real', if they were -- whether or not he is right to have trusted them so fully, if they were not -- to what extent they are a literary device. My own feeling is that Traherne's writing, like most writing, is a web of experience and imagination. Whether the story he tells of his childhood is a literary fiction or a recalling of fact is not, to my mind, the important question. One must read his childhood much in the way one reads a parable -- as a story which may have happened exactly as it is told or may not, but which reveals an underlying truth which is, in any case, greater than the factual total of its parts. And so, questions of literary device and historical exactitude aside, I approach Traherne's childhood as a story that is true in the most important sense. And so I begin with his beginning, with his brand new "open eyes":

"How like an Angel came I down!" he exclaims[414]. He was "a little Stranger"[415] in this world, God's "Son and Heir"[416], untouched by sadness, he did not know of such a thing as sin.[417] And in this state, his vision was clear. In the third *Century*, he writes:

> "Those Pure and Virgin Apprehensions I had from the Womb, and that Divine Light wherewith I was born, are the Best unto this Day, wherin I can see the Universe. ...Certainly Adam in Paradice had not more sweet and Curious Apprehensions of the World, then I when I was a child."[418]

Not only are these early experiences of the world 'sweet'; to Traherne, they also reveal eternal truth. He claims that his early visions are from God. "My Knowledg was Divine"[419], he writes in the third *Century*, and reiterates this claim in a poem also contained in the same *Century*:

> "He [God] in our Childhood with us Walks.
> And with our Thoughts Mysteriously He talks;
> He often Visiteth our Minds,...
>
> and
>
> ... O Lord, I Wonder at Thy lov,
> Which did my Infancy so Early mov:"[420]

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[414] "Wonder" l. 1.

[415] *C.* III. 2.

[416] "The Salutation" l. 36.

[417] "Eden" v. 2 : "I knew not that there was a Serpents Sting,/ Whose Poyson shed/ On Men, did overspread/ The World: nor did I Dream of such a Thing/ As sin;" ; also C. III 2. : "I knew not that there were any sins, or complaints or laws."

[418] *C.* III. 1.

[419] *C.* III. 2.

[420] *C.* III. 4. The same poem appears as "The Approach" in the Dobell Folio (Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. c. 42.) and in the *Poems of Felicity* (British Museum MS. Burney 392.)

In this state of early felicity, the infant Traherne communicated with the natural world as well as with God. He writes:

> "The World resembled his Eternitie,
> In which my Soul did Walk;
> And evry Thing that I did see
> Did with me talk."[421]

It was as if he belonged to everything and everything belonged to him. His sense of self as separate was not yet formed and he perceived a kind of unity between himself and the world around him. In "Wonder" he explains, "I felt a Vigour in my Sence/ That was all SPIRIT. I within did flow/ With Seas of Life, like Wine;"; and in "My Spirit" he elaborates:

> "My Naked Simple Life was I.
> That Act so Strongly Shind
> Upon the Earth, the Sea, the Skie,
> That was the Substance of My Mind.
> The Sence it self was I.
> I felt no Dross nor Matter in my soul,
> No Brims nor Borders, such as in a Bowl
> We see, My Essence was Capacitie."[422]

Not only did he not perceive himself as having borders, but he also had no separate 'wings' or 'hands' or 'eyes' or 'knees to kneel'. He *felt* via this "capacitie" and whatever he *thought* was from this same source. "That [Capacitie] felt all Things,/ The thought that Springs/ Therfrom's it self." Thus he perceived his spirit as being in some sense like the Divine:

> "But being Simple like the Deitie
> In its own Centre is a Sphere
> Not shut up here, but evry Where.

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[421] " Wonder" ls. 5-8.

[422] "My Spirit" ll.1-8.

It Acts not from a Centre to
Its Object as remote
But present is, *when it doth view*,
Being with the Being it doth note."[423]

Thus it was that, while he had sight, all belonged to him and he to everything. It is part of the Edenic vision that everything should be his:

"The Citie [of his childhood] seemed to stand in Eden, or to be Built in Heaven. The Streets were mine, the Temple was mine, the People were mine, their Clothes and Gold and Silver were mine, as much as their Sparkling Eys fair Skins and ruddy faces. The Skies were mine, and so were the Sun and Moon and SWars, and all the World was mine;"[424]

Likewise, in "Wonder",

"The Streets seem'd paved with golden Stones,
The Boys and Girls all mine;
To me how did their lovly faces shine!
The Sons of men all Holy ones
In Joy and Beauty, then appear'd to me;
And evry Thing I found,
(While like an Angel I did see)
Adorn'd the Ground.

Rich Diamonds, and Pearl, and Gold
Might evry where be seen;
Rare Colors, yellow, blew, red, white and green
Mine Eys on evry side behold:
All that I saw, a Wonder did appear;
Amazement was my Bliss:
That and my Wealth met evry where. ...

Property its self was mine,
And Hedges, Ornaments;
Walls, Boxes, Coffers, and their rich Contents
To make me Rich combine.
Cloaths, costly Jewels, Laces, I esteem'd
My Wealth by others worn,
For me they all to wear them seem'd,
When I was born."[425]

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[423] This and preceding short quote from "My Spirit" ls. 9-14, 15-21. (italics mine).

[424] *C.* III. 3.

[425] "Wonder" using the version from the Burney MS (British Museum). Note that all of this wealth was his 'while he saw like an angel'. His ownership of the world, or at least his awareness of and enjoyment in it, seems to have been lost with the loss of vision.

Although Traherne admits that his particular experience of infancy and his ability to recall it in maturity are unusual gifts,[426] he also claims that what was revealed in them is universal. Those early experiences of being at one with the world around him and with God, though they seem unusual, are, in fact, natural -- they are what we are all born to. Traherne claims that his vision of beatitude, his right way of seeing was something he had "from the womb"[427]. In direct contrast to the church's doctrine of original sin, Traherne recalls, "I seemed as one Brought into the Estate of Innocence."[428] He refers to "The first Light which shined in my Infancy in its Primitive and Innocent Clarity"[429]; and he begins the first *Century* with the testimony: "An Empty Book is like an Infants Soul, in which any Thing may be Written. It is Capable of all Things, but containeth Nothing."[430] The image here is clearly one of spotless purity.

"like an angel" here refers to innocent vision rather than disembodiment. Traherne's angel does not follow the bodiless Thomistic model for whom immediacy renders speech unnecessary.

[426] He writes of his 'pure and virgin apprehensions' of childhood: "By the *Gift* of GOD they attended me into the World, and by His *Special* favor I remember them till now." *C.* III. 1. (italics mine.)

[427] *C.* III. 1.

[428] *C.* III. 2. Whilst Salter sees Traherne as "crypto-Pelagian" (*Thomas Traherne* p. 132-134), Martz (*Paradise Within*, p. 87) claims "there is nothing heretical or occult in Traherne's conviction that he came into the world with ...Divine Light". Marks (intro. to *CE*, p.xxxix) circumambulates the label 'heretic' by emphasising Traherne's confidence in the larger ultimately redemptive story: "...concerning the stain created by Adam's lapse. Traherne instead of squinting at the stain, gazed at the whole fabric, and in gazing found a Christian hope." To trace the debate concerning Traherne's orthodoxy see chapter one.

[429] *C.* III. 7.

[430] *C.* I. 1.

His poetry, too, is full of similar images. In "Innocence" what he can recall of his infancy is joyful and pure:

> "But that which most I wonder at, which most
> I did esteem my Bliss, which most I Boast,
> And ever shall Enjoy, is that within
> I felt no Stain, nor Spot of Sin.
> No Darkness then did overshade,
> But all within was Pure and Bright,
> No guilt did Crush, nor fear invade
> But all my soul was full of Light.
>
> A Joyfull Sence and Puritie
> Is all I can remember.
> The very Night to me was Bright,
> Twas Summer in December....
>
> No inward Stain inclined my Will
> To Avarice or Pride: My Soul was still
> With Admiration fill'd; No Lust nor Strife
> Polluted then my Infant-Life."[431]

In "Wonder", his complete well being is described as "A Native Health and Innocence"[432]. Almost all of "Eden" is given over to describing the joy of his infant innocence in which he was a new Adam in paradise:

> "...No Error, no Distraction, I
> Saw cloud the Earth, or over-cast the Sky.
>
> I knew not that there was a Serpent's Sting,
> Whose Poyson shed
> On Men, did overspread
> The World: Nor did I dream of such a thing
> As Sin; in which Mankind lay Dead."

His childhood is Edenic, then, not just because of the "learned and happy Ignorance"[433] in which he remains *unaware* of original sin, but because, according to Traherne, there *is* no

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[431] "Innocence" ls. 1-12 and 25-28.

[432] "Wonder" ls. 17-18.

inherited or original sin in his nature. In his view of things, sin is learned rather than inherited. In a statement presaging modern psychological insight, he asserts: "it is not our Parents Loyns, so much as our Parents lives, that Enthrals and Blinds us."[434]. And yet, it remains impossible for any of us to escape the sin of Adam. "Yet," he continues, "is all our Corruption Derived from Adam : inasmuch as all theEvil Examples and inclinations of the World arise from His Sin.".[435] Even as he admits the fall, his phrase,"of the world" reiterates the essential alienness of evil, and his insistence that Adam's sin is passed on to us by way of "evil examples", again seems to challenge the orthodox view. He accepts the doctrine of the fall, but it is an individual fall which we each repeat. Adam in Paradise is the model of our ideal, and Adam fallen is our inevitable reality -- a reality he experiences with bitterness and regret.[436] For Traherne,

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[433] The opening line of "Eden".

[434] *C.* III. 8.

[435] Ibid.

[436] Traherne's attitude to sin is serious and deeply penitent "I grieve at Sins, and war against them, abhorring the world, and myself more" he writes (C. III. 48.). And of sin: "Sin! Its ugly face /More terror, than its dwelling place/ Contains" ... "Sin! wilt thou vanquish me?...Shall I remain/ As one that's slain/ And never more lift up the head?" (*C.* III. 49,50.) His experience of waging war on sin seems to have caused him sufficient pain and loss to convince him of its reality. "I cannot meet with Sin, but it kills me," he writes (*C.* III. 51) "There is no calamity but Sin alone." His use of the term 'war' in connection with sin indicates his taking strong action against it. Clearly then, for Traherne, the notion that one's nature is essentially good rather than evil does not excuse one or absolve one from bearing the responsibility of one's actions in falling away. See also *SM* II.34-36; *SM* II.6. See also *CE.*p.118 in which he affirms "That man is a Sinner, that he is prone to Evil, and Obnoxious to GODS Wrath, that nevertheless he is spared by the Long-suffering of GOD, and that GOD Loveth him, and desireth his Salvation."

the great horror of sin is that it is a kind of deformity which disfigures the soul, making it unlovely to God.

> "Yet Lov can forbear, and Lov can forgiv. Tho it can never be reconciled to an unlovly Object. ...and you are infinitly unlovly by Despising GOD, and His Lov so long. Yea one Act only of Despite done to the smallest Creature made you infinitly deformed. What shall becom of you therfore since GOD cannot be reconciled to an Ugly Object? Verily you are in Danger of Perishing Eternaly. He cannot indeed be reconciled to an ugly Object as it is Ugly. but as it is capable of being otherwise He may. He can never therfore be reconciled to your sin, becaus sin it self is uncapable of being Altered : but He may be reconciled to your Person, becaus that may be restored : and which is an infinit Wonder, to Greater Beauty and Splendour then before."[437]

The original, which has been marred, is beauty. Again, sin is portrayed as unnatural, an aberration;

> "God made Man upright at the first;
> Man made himself by Sin accurst:
> Sin is a Deviation from the Way
> Of God: 'Tis that wherin a Man doth stray
> From the first Path wherin he was to walk,
> From the first Truth he was to talk"[438]

All of this 'going astray' is the direct result of the individual's loss of right sight, according to Traherne. Every act that falls short of Love's ideal does so because the actor first failed to see as God sees. Right sight, that "first light" is eclipsed in each of us as it was in Traherne by the "tinselled vanities" and "manners of men", -- what Traherne collectively refers to as "Custom". These are the lessons in misprizing referred to in the previous section:

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[437] *C.* II. 30. In his fierce separation of ugliness and God, Traherne echoes the Platonic notion of Beauty as part of the Good. "We may even say that Beauty is the Authentic-Existents and Ugliness is the Principle contrary to Existence: and the Ugly is also the primal evil; therefore its contrary is at once good and beautiful, or is Good and Beauty.... And Beauty, this Beauty which is also The Good, must be posed as The First:" (Plotinus: *The Enneads*, 6. I. 6.)

[438] "Adam" ls. 1-6.

"The first Light which shined in my Infancy in its Primitive and Innocent Clarity was totally Ecclypsed : insomuch that I was fain to learn all again. If you ask me how it was Ecclypsed? Truly by the Customs and maners of Men, which like Contrary Winds blew it out : by an innumerable company of other Objects, rude vulgar and Worthless Things, that like so many loads of Earth and Dung did over whelm and Bury it : ... All Mens thoughts and Words were about other Matters; They all prized New Things which I did not dream of. I was a stranger and unaquainted with them; I was little and reverenced their Authority; I was weak, and easily guided by their Example : Ambitious also, and Desirous to approve my self unto them. And finding no one Syllable in any mans Mouth of those Things, by Degrees they vanished, My Thoughts (as indeed what is more fleeting than a Thought) were blotted out. And at last all the Celestial Great and Stable Treasures to which I was born, as wholy forgotten, as if they had never been."439

This is even more to be lamented, says Traherne, since one's natural disposition is to mistrust "custom", and to believe in the bounty of God and of creation:

"Had any man spoken of it, it had been the most easy Thing in the World, to hav taught me, and to hav made me believ that Heaven and Earth was GODS Hous, and that He gav it me. That the Sun was mine and that Men were mine, and that Cities and Kingdoms were mine also: that Earth was better then Gold, and that Water was, every Drop of it, was a Precious Jewel. And that these were Great and Living Treasures : and that all Riches whatsoever els was Dross in Comparison. From whence I clearly find how Docible our Nature is in natural Things, were it rightly entreated. And that our Misery proceedeth ten thousand times more from the outward Bondage of Opinion and Custom, then from any inward corruption or Depravation of Nature:"[440]

He insists:

"It was a Difficult matter to persuade me that the Tinsild Ware upon a Hobby hors was a fine thing. They did impose upon me, and Obtrude their Gifts that made me believ a Ribban or a Feather Curious. I could not see where was the Curiousness or fineness : And to Teach me that A Purs of Gold was of any valu seemed impossible,"[441]

Similarly, such poems as "Ease", "Nature" and "An Infant Ey" praise the ease with which the soul perceives the revelation of God's generosity in the natural world. "That Custom is a Second Nature, we/ Most Plainly find by Nature's Purity./ For Nature teacheth

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[439] *C.* III. 7.

[440] *C.* III. 8.

[441] *C.* III. 9.

Nothing but the Truth"[442], his poetry proclaims. In "Dumnesse" he mourns the arrival of speech (and with it "Sin and Death...infused by accursed Breath") insisting that contemplation of "the Eternal Springs" was more complete before the outside world could convey its false message of 'custom' to the infant mind. "*I then my Bliss did, when my Silence, break*," he writes, and "*The first Impressions are Immortal all*:"[443]. Likewise, with equal passion, the cry "O that my Sight had ever simple been!" reverberates not only through the whole of "An Infant Ey", but also through much of his poetry and a great deal of the *Centuries*.

Traherne believed that it was through the influence of others -- children, adults, those whose access to language made them able to reinterpret the world around him -- that he lost his infant vision and came to misprize everything around him. This large scale misapprehension is referred to many times, particularly in the third *Century*, as a deadly and dangerous thing[444] which leads to a life lived "among Shadows"[445] instead of in "the

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[442] "Nature" ls. 1-3.

[443] "Dumnesse" ls. 1-13,20,85. Compare this with the speechlessness of Dante at the end of the *Divine Comedy* and with Aquinas who 'spoke' because he didn't want to leave things unsaid.

[444] The language he uses to denounce 'custom' is reminiscent of the fiery and colourful language of *Roman Forgeries*. Eg. "But to say this house is yours, and these lands are another man's, and the bauble is a jewel and this gew-gew a fine thing, this rattle makes music, etc. is deadly barbarous and uncouth to a little child; and makes him suspect all you say, because the nature of the thing contradicts your words." (C. III. 11.) "You would not think how these barbarous inventions spoil your knowledge. They put grubs and worms in men's heads that are enemies to all pure and true apprehensions, and eat out all their happiness." (*C.* III. 13.)

[445] *C.* III. 14.

Divine Light"[446] which he believes is every person's by birth. "Custom", therefore becomes the filthy spoiler of all joy, the rot at the root of human error. That each person falls, loses sight, as a result of custom is inevitable; however, all is not lost. We have at our disposal the benefits of 'the divine light' -- a concept integral to Traherne's notion of the restoration of right sight.

Again and again his imagery is of light and sight over against darkness and blindness -- imagery he held in common with the Cambridge Platonists, those "men of Cambridge who naturalized Plato an Englishman"[447]. Although himself an Oxford man at a time when the curricula consisted of much more Aristotle and Aquinas than Plato, and situated in a most Puritan college[448], Traherne, nevertheless found himself drawn to the same texts that attracted the attention of the Cambridge Platonists: Plotinus, Ficino, Hermes

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[446] C. III. 1.

[447] Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", p. 521. Marks lists them as Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Peter Sterry, Ralph Cudworth, Nathanael Culverwell, and John Worthington, students and Fellows of Emmanuel College, and Henry More of Christ's.

[448] The Principal of Brasenose during Traherne's time was the Puritan, Dr Greenwood, appointed by the Parliamentary Visitors, and the college was strictly governed. The college grew and flourished during Greenwood's time, the numbers in residence rising from 20-120.(Wade, p. 49). Both Wade and Salter quote from the *Visitors Register* giving examples of the religious rigour which held sway in Traherne's day: "every Tutor ... at some convenient time beween the houres of seven and tenne in the evening" was to "cause their Pupills to repair to their chambers to pray with them"; and that "every Lord's Day" all bachelors of arts and undergraduates were to give "an account ... of the sermons they have heard, and their attendance on other religious exercises on that day." (*Visitors Register* July 1653 and June 1653).

Trismegistus as well as Plato.[449] Although ideological and temperamental differences separated him at different points from the men of Cambridge,[450] his thought is, as Beachcroft put it, "thoroughly representative of their salient ideas"[451] . They all held, amongst other things, that there existed in each person a "natural light", placed there by God which did not disagree with the light of reason. Culverwell, writing about the capacity of man's reason to grasp the natural law refers to "cleare and undelible Principles, some first and Alphabetical Notions," which "are stampt and printed upon the being of man"[452]. And in Traherne's *Commonplace Book* we find the following:

> "And indeed these common seeds of naturall Light are a private Law, which God has deepely engraven on mens consciences, and is universally extensive unto all, though with a latitude of Degrees; it being in some more, in some Lesse, but in all in great measure obliterated, and

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[449] Certainly Sterry read Plato, Plotinus, and Ficino, these texts being cited amongst others in his possession by Pinto, (*Peter Sterry*, p. 57). For a fuller account of the literary diet of More and the other Platonists see Marks, "Traherne and Cambridge Platonism" pp. 521-523. We know that Traherne read from all the above writers' works from the notes in the *EN* (Bodl. Ms. Lat. Misc. f. 45.) and the *CB*(Bodl. MS. Eng. Poet. c. 42.).

[450] Psychologically, he has most in common with Peter Sterry, but we know that he read Henry More because he quoted from More's *Divine Dialogues* (London, 1668) in *CB* (s.v. "Cohaesion", "Deitie", "Omnipresence" foll, 26v.2, 33.2-33v.2, and 71v.2-72.1.) According to Marks, More's "spiritual autobiography resembles Traherne's: their responses to the new ideas of space were remarkably alike in feeling, yet Traherne took issue vigorously with More's theories of space and deity, and in general lacked More's intellectual extravagance in the theological matters." ("Traherne and Cambridge Platonism" p. 521). In support of this, see several entries in *CB* which attack More's theories of space (fol. 33v.1. and fol. 33.2.)

[451] T.O. Beachcroft, "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists" *DR*, vol. 186. (1930) p. 290.

[452] *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature, With Several Other Treatises*, Nathanael Culverwell, ed. William Dillingham (London, 1652) p. 54.

> defaced since the *fall.* It is also by Divines generally termed the *Light*, or *Law of Nature*, because it flows in, and with, and from Human Nature, eyther immediately, or mediately."[453]

It is to these "seeds of natural light", God's "private Law... engraven on mens Consciences" that Traherne refers when he speaks of the "pure and virgin apprehensions" of his infancy and of the "divine light" in which he was born (*C*.III.1). Such was Traherne's confidence in this Light of Nature, that he asserts that all things except the doctrine of Redemption "are evident in themselves by the Light of Nature, because they may either be clearly deduced from the principles of Reason, or certainly discerned by plain Experience:"[454]. For Traherne, reason, experience and the natural or divine light work together to reveal God's truth. What the natural light intuits, reason and experience confirm; and those truths that lie buried "under the Rubbish of our Fall"[455] may be found again.[456] Traherne claims that the truths he "knew by intuition" in his infancy, he regained, after his "Apostacy", "by the Highest Reason"[457]. And in *Christian Ethicks*, he reaffirms the interconnectedness of faith and reason: "*Faith* is by *Reason* confirmed, and

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[453] *CB*, sv "Reason" fol. 83 col.1. quoted from Theophilus Gale: *Court of the Gentiles.* vol. I. part II. As Marks points out, ("Traherne and Camb. Plat."), this passage may be the one referred to by Traherne s.v. "Light", fol. 64:1: "The Light of Nature. vid. Reason."

[454] *CE.* ch. 16, p.119.

[455] Ibid.

[456] This view that truth lies waiting to be uncovered, rather than that it has been utterly forsaken, that the human intelligence has been disused rather than abandoned, corresponds with a similar stance taken by Trouillard: "Vice is not a perversion of intelligence, but a condition in which this activity is absent or dormant. Wrongdoing is not so much a rebellion and defiance as bewilderment and weariness.". (Jean Trouillard, "L'impecabilite de l'esprit selon Plotin". *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions.* 1953, pp. 19-28.). There are shades of this kind of thinking in Traherne, although Traherne admits rebellion or apostacy.

[457] *C.* III. 2.

Reason is by *Faith* Perfected."[458]. This reason, although it embraced the insights of science emerging in Traherne's day, saw no disparity between the miracles of space and the miracles of the Christian tradition. Traherne, like the Cambridge Platonists, believed that all true revelation was divine revelation, truth revealed via reason no less revered than truth revealed through miracle or sign. This new assertion of reason by the Platonists caused much distress amongst the orthodox -- where might such open inquisitiveness end?[459] Whichcote's response to those of his day for whom Christian revelation and reason were irreconcilable was confident and clear:

> "I find that some men take offence...to hear *reason* spoken of out of a pulpit, or to hear those great words of *natural light*, of *principles of reason, and conscience*. They are doubtless in a mighty mistake ... there is no inconsistency between the *Grace of God*, and the calling upon men carefully to use, improve and employ *the principles of God's creation*."[460]

To Culverwell, reason and the divine light or "Law of Nature", written in the heart of man and in the natural world around him, work together, reason like a hen incubating the egg of natural law:

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[458] *CE.* ch. 15, p. 112.

[459] The panic of the orthodox was perhaps not wholly unfounded. Even in retrospect, the pace of change seems incredible, as Cragg notes (*The Church and the Age of Reason*, p. 80) : "The importance of the Restoration era lies in the intellectual changes which it witnessed. Within little more than a generation we pass from an atmosphere still predominantly medieval to one which is essentially modern. The prevailing outlook changed. Questions emerged which still command our interest. We still discuss the place of reason, the nature of authority, the character of the universe, and we do so in the spirit which first appeared in the latter part of the seventeenth century."

[460] Whichcote, *Works* (London, 1751) vol. I. Discourse XXIII, p. 370.

> "Reason thus ... by warming and brooding upon these first and oval Principles of her own laying, it being itself quicken'd with an heavenly vigour, does thus hatch the Law of Nature."[461]

To the Platonists, as to Traherne, man, in the image of God, is only fully human when exercising those divine faculties such as reason and intuition. This view did not rest easily with the prevailing Laudian and Puritan dogmas, requiring as it did, a simpler doctrinal system in which one might remain open to knowledge in whatever form it might appear, providing it proved its power to liberate man's mind and enrich his spirit. In this atmosphere of openness, their theology developed, not as a set of doctrines, but as a practice[462] based on the values (such as tolerance, reason, the centrality of man, the goodness of God and of the universe, etc.) implicit in the Platonic tradition. As Willey notes, the Cambridge Platonists "reject[ed] no article of the Faith, but they shift[ed] the

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[461] Culverwell, *Discourse of the Light of Nature*, p. 82. Interestingly, the same image of the brooding hen is used by Theophilus Gale in *Court of the Gentiles*, to describe God's creation of the universe: "In this description of *Moses* Gen. 1. 2. we have the Spirit's *Motion*, *Fomentation*, and *Formation* of all things out of this *Chaos,* or *watery mixture* in these words, [*and the Spirit of God moved etc.*] P. Fagius explains 779 here, by *motion* and *agitation*; or by *Fomentation* of an *Hen*, that sets a brood."(Discourse II, ch. III, p. 323-324.). Both pictures -- man's reason and God's creation -- are of a mind ordering substance out of disparity or out of chaos. Yet the image chosen to depict this is distinctly female; we are called to imagine brooding, incubating, nursing, hatching qualities, the creative force happening in the womb and in the nest. Ultimately, then, the mind's bringing order out of chaos is depicted as a kind of birth; and reason as a participation in God's act of creation. This corresponds with the Neo-platonic notion that to use one's reason is to act in the image of God. Hence, also, the appropriateness of Traherne's claim that birth is necessary to renewal of vision.

[462] 'Practice' or 'action' is imperative in the Neo-platonic tradition. Smith makes this very clear in his *Select Discourses* when he writes: "Were I indeed to define *Divinity*, I should rather call it *a Divine life*, then *a Divine science*;" ...and he speaks of "this *True Method of Knowing* [the divine], which is not so much by *Notions* as *Actions*; ... He that is most *Practical* in Divine things, hath the purest and sincerest Knowledge of them, and not he that is most *Dogmatical*." (*Discourse I* , "Attaining Divine Knowledge" pp. 1-2).

emphasis of exhortation, affirming values where orthodoxy affirmed facts."[463] This tolerance permitted the kind of "latitude" to which Burnet refers when he writes that: "They [the Cambridge men] wished things might have been carried with more moderation; ... and allowed a great freedom both in philosophy and divinity: from whence they were called men of latitude. And upon this men of narrower thoughts and fiercer tempers fastened upon them the name of Latitudinarians."[464] In a tumultuous England, poised between the authority-dependent dogmas of both Laudian and Puritan, and the emergence of the Age of Reason; the new thinking of the Cambridge Platonists caught like wildfire. Passions flared and labels were bandied.[465] Their fame (or infamy) spread faster than any real knowledge of their teachings so that one scholar from Oxford wrote: "I can come into no company of late, but I find the chief discourse to be about a certain new sect of men called *Latitude-men*:" Like other scholars, he had heard that their teachings were "heresy"; by reputation they had been "represented as a party very

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[463] Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (London, 1934), p. 138.

[464] *History Of My Own Time*, ed. Osmund Airy, I. Oxford, 1897. p. 334. The historian, and eventual Bishop of Salisbury, Burnet, who attributes to Whichcote and his followers, the salvation of the Restoration Church, ("...if a new set of men had not appeared of another stamp, the church had quite lost her esteem over the nation" pp. 330-331) also in *A Supplement to Burnet's History of My Own Time*, (ed. H. C. Foxcroft, Oxford, 1902), complained that "latitude and moderation were odious to the greater part" of theologians at Cambridge at the time.

[465] To appreciate the full force of their latitude in a country only recently restored to order, see Cragg, *The Church and theAge of Reason*,p. 37-49; and *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, p. 87-113. In the face of this kind of fear it may seem strange to read Burnet's account of these men as individuals: "Dr. More, whose candour and philosophic temper charmed me much" (*A Supplement*, p. 46) and " Whichcot ... a man of a rare temper, very mild and obliging", not to mention "Cudworth...of great conduct and prudence" (*History*..., pp. 331-332.)

dangerous both to the King and Church, as seeking to undermine them both:", "all of suddain ... formidable" and poisonous. Yet, despite the fierce language used against them, no real evidence had been given as to the specifics of their guilt: "though the name be in every man's mouth, yet the explicit meaning of it, or the heresy which they hold... are as unknown (for ought I can learn) as the order of Rosy-crucians... to say the truth, I can meet with nothing distinct concerning them"[466]. In this general climate of suspicion and fear, there were, nevertheless, those willing to support the 'latitude men'[467]. Central to this debate about the orthodoxy of the latitudinarians was their reliance upon their own reason. Simon Patrick, whose pamphlet of 1662 supported their views wrote:

> "And now let no man accuse them of hearkning too much to their own reason, since their reason steers by so excellent a compass, the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church. For Reason is that faculty whereby a man must judge of every thing, nor can a man beleve any thing except he have some reason for it, whether that reason be a deduction from the light of

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[466] From the letter entitled "For my worthy friend Mr. S. P. at Cambridge" which prompted the pamphlet *A Brief Account of the new Sect of Latitude-men Together with Some Reflections upon the New Philosophy*, (London: 1662). S.P. is widely held to be Simon Patrick (1626-1707), initially a follower of the Cambridge Platonists, he was later identified with the high church wing. He became Dean of Peterborough, 1679, then Bishop of Chichester, 1689, and finally of Ely, 1691. Burnet records that he "appears to have been a model parish priest (St Paul's, Covent Garden); and he was one of the few who stayed at his post during the Plague." *(History of My Own Time*, p. 336). S. P. described the latitudinarians as young men of good standing, well-educated, pious, orthodox Anglicans who practiced latitude of interpretation only in areas where "the Church her selfe leaves them to their liberty." (op. cit. p. 11).

[467] The 'latitude-men' to whom S.P. refers are the Cambridge Platonists. A distinction is made by Cragg (*The Church and the Age of Reason*, pp. 70-71.) between the Cambridge Platonists as the "university teachers" who preceded the Latitudinarians and the Latitudinarians themselves, those "prominent churchmen" who were their followers. This distinction, whilst it may accurately describe, retrospectively, the way in which the Neo-Platonist movement developed, (the Latitudinarians as a broader movement emerging from the 'original' Cambridge Platonists), seems to me a false one, or at least an unnnecessary one with regard to the men discussed in this paper who neither made such a distinction themselves, nor were so described by their contemporaries. For this reason I have used the terms interchangeably, and the Latitudinarians to whom I refer (as does S. P. above) are chiefly those early Cambridge Platonists. Most of the work of the later Latitudinarians is less relevant to Traherne's.

> nature, and those principles which are the candle of the Lord, set up in the soul of every man that hath not wilfully extinguished it; or a branch of Divine revelation in the oracles of holy Scripture; or the general interpretation of genuine antiquity, or the proposal of our own Church consentaneous thereto, or lastly the result of some or all of these: for he that will rightly make use of his Reason, must take all that is reasonable into consideration."[468]

Patrick's use of the phrase "the candle of the Lord"[469] is not unique. It was a text often quoted by Benjamin Whichcote and used so frequently by Culverwell in his *Discourse of the Light of Nature*, that it seems a kind of motif in the text. For Culverwell, this phrase forms the basis of an extended exploration of 'natural law' which, he contends, is published by 'the candle of the Lord' in the soul of humanity and is recognised by the 'light of reason'[470]. Traherne too, in the *Church's Year-Book*, prays "O H. Spirit ... be Thou the Candle of the Lord shining in me that must never go out."[471] Once again the imagery of light and darkness is shared by Traherne and the Platonists. And more than imagery -- As Beachcroft notes, Whichcote was criticised because he "cried up reason" and had allegedly misinterpreted "The lamp of the Lord", phrases which are "the very two heads of Traherne's similarity with the Platonists".[472]

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[468] S.P. op. cit. p. 10.

[469] Proverbs 20:27. " The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," Authorised Version.

[470] Culverwell, *Discourse of the Light of Nature*. reprint: Edinburgh, 1857. ed. John Brown. p. 98-100.

[471] *CYB*, (Bodl. MS. Eng. th. e. 51) fol. 50.

[472] Beachcroft, "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists", *Dublin Review*, p. 283. Earlier in the same essay, Beachcroft identifies two common features between the Cam. Platonists and Traherne: 1) the attempt to translate the mystic experience in intellectual terms rather than in a mood of self-centered ecstacy. 2) the fundamental belief in the appearance of the divine image in the mind of man.

Because for Traherne, as for the Cambridge Platonists, the divine light and the contemporary revelation of the new philosophy or of science point to and originate in the same truth, which is God, there is a freedom to explore the capacity of the human mind. Thomas Glanvill, a contemporary of Traherne's at Oxford, says of the Cambridge men that having completed their required studies, they continued their quest for knowledge amongst not only the ancients, but also the moderns:

> "They read, and consider'd all sorts of *late* Improvements in *Anatomy, Mathematicks, Natural History*, and *Mechanicks*, and acquainted themselves with the *Experimental Philosophy* of *Solomon's House*, and the other Promoters of it. So that there was not any valuable Discovery made, or Notion started in any part of *Real Learning*, but they got considerable knowledge of it." [473]

Traherne too studied a full range of subjects including "Logick, Ethicks, Physicks, Metaphysicks, Geometry, Astronomy, Poesie, Medicine, Grammer, Musick, Rhetorick, all kinds of Arts Trades and Mechanicismes". His study of the natural sciences, rather than giving him cause to doubt the providence of God, increased his faith. Of his time at Oxford he writes: "I saw into the Nature of the Sea, the Heavens, the Sun, the Moon and Stars, the Elements, Minerals, and Vegetables. All which appeared like the Kings Daughter, All Glorious within; and those things [divine truths] which my Nurses, and Parents should hav talkt of, there were taught unto Me."[474] As Marks records, "Like

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[473] Glanvill, "Anti-fanatical Religion and Free Philosophy" Essay 7 in *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion.* (London, 1676), p. 9. Joseph Glanvill entered Exeter College in 1652, (Traherne, Basenose in 1653) and, according to Anthony a Wood, regretted not having gone to Cambridge. He admired the works of Henry More and some of the other Cambridge Platonists.

[474] This and preceding quotation are from *C.* III. 36. There are also many references to Traherne's range of subjects particularly the new sciences in *KOG.* Cf. Notes 215, 216.

More, he [Traherne] found inspiration in Platonism conjoined with the new perceptions offered by the microscope and telescope;"[475] his study of science and the new philosophy reaffirming his infant intuitions. Whereas the Puritans often suspected the new discoveries of science, the Platonists, and Traherne alongside them(as we will see in more detail in chapter five), apprehended God "in and through nature, not in spite of or beyond it", the latitude of their approach enabling them "to bring together the new knowledge and the old faith."[476] So great was Traherne's faith in the revelatory power of the natural world that he wondered how the heathens can have missed the truth it tells:

> "I wonder much, (the World being so Beautiful and Glorious in every Eye, so really deep and valuable in Worth, so peculiarly applied to the use and service of every person;) that the Heathens did miss the fruition of it, and fail to measure themselves and their Felicity, by the Greatness of its Beauty, and the Joy which all the Creatures ought to produce in the mind of Man by their real Services. For the Earth is really better than if all its Globe were of beaten Gold, the Seas are better than if all their Abysses were full of Diamonds, the Air is better, than if all the space between us and the Skys were full of Scepters, and the Sun alone a greater Treasure then all the wealthy Mines in the Indies: every man is surrounded with all the Light of their Advantages, and so much served by them, as if no man but himself were alive in the World."[477]

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[475] Marks. op. cit. p. 528.

[476] G.R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, 1950) p. 53. In as much as Cragg discusses the Cambridge Platonists over against the Puritans, he is right. But when the Platonists come up against 'the new knowledge' in the form of the materialistic determinism of Hobbes, their recourse to reason fails them. As Beachcroft puts it, "They [the C.P.] wrote to give a 'reason for the hope that is in us'. Hobbes wrote to give a reason for the hope that is not in us." (p. 289). Over this dividing line the two camps' assertions of reason became simply one declaration hurled against another.

[477] *CE.* p59. Indeed, thought Traherne, despite our learning, by our despising the worth of the natural world, we are less wise than the heathen: "By this you may see who are the rude and barbarous Indians : For verily there is no savage nation under the cope of Heaven, that is more absurdly barbarous than the Christian World. They that go naked and drink water and live upon roots are like Adam, or Angels in comparison of us....I am sure those barbarous people that go naked, come nearer to Adam, God, and Angels in the simplicity of their wealth, though not in knowledge." (C. III.12.) Culverwell, too, in his *Light of Nature.* (p. 118) quotes Salmasius: "the famous

The divine light then, according to Traherne is to be found in the created world of nature as well as in the heart of the individual. Unlike Sterry, for whom the created world is a veil upon the face of the divine which reveals only obscurely, the world to Traherne is a revelation of the divine as full as if it were God's own body. Where Sterry writes:

> "The Creation of the World was a Vail cast upon the Face of God, with a figure of the Godhead wrought upon this vail, and God Himself seen throught it by a dim transparency; as Sun in a morning, or Mist, is seen by a refracted Light through the thick medium of earthly Vapours"[478] ;

Traherne asserts:

> "how do we know, but the World is that Body, which the Deity hath assumed to manifest His Beauty, and by which He maketh Himself as visible, as it is possible He should?"[479]

In Traherne's understanding of the world as more than "this little Cottage of Heaven and Earth", but containing also "the Heavens and the Heavens of Heavens, and the Angels, and the Celestial Powers"[480], infinity and power are expressed as well as beauty and

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Salmasius ... tells us that he had rather search for nature's law in a naked Indian, than in a spruce Athenian; in a meer Pagan, rather than in a Jew or Christian."

[478] Pinto, op. cit. p. 95. According to Pinto, the first creation is called by Sterry, "a kind of Incarnation; for in that the Image of God was made Flesh" (p. 98). Sterry writes of the manifestation of God in nature using vivid images of root, blood and body: "The natural Being of every person hath his Root in the Grave of Christ, and is watered with his blood.... He is the Root out of which every natural...Plant springs, which brings forth himself through every natural existence, and brings forth himself out of it as the flower, the brightness of the Glory of God. He is the Root and Truth of all things." (*A Discourse on the Freedom of the Will*. London, 1675.). Clearly, Sterry holds a high view of the image of God in the natural world, but, for him, this image is lost in Adam's fall. Whereas, for Traherne, the image of God in creation remains full; it is the sight of humanity which is faulty.

[479] *C*. II. 20. See also *SM* IV..34 in which Traherne argues that God is invisible and yet has manifested himself in the world as an assumed body to shew his divine attributes; and *KOG* ch 27: "God therefore being Incorporeal is seen in his Works: and the World is the Glorious Body, which he hath assumed to make himself famous." (269v-270r). In each case God does this to satisfiy the atheist or sceptic.

[480] *C*. I. 18.

goodness and other attributes of God. And this disclosure of the divine through "The Brightness and Magnificence of this World"[481] is plainly visible to all. According to this understanding of divine light, its manifestation supersedes the boundaries between Christian and Pagan, speaking of eternal truth which, however partial, predates the revelation of Christ. Here Traherne is in the main stream of Christian Platonism which has carried on into recent centuries. In his early twentieth century book *The Platonic Tradition*, Inge defends the ancient roots of Christian Platonism, recording "the remarkable fact that a new spiritual enlightenment, quite unique in character, came to all the civilised peoples of the earth in the millenium before the Christian era.", and in his plea for "a third type of Christian thought" [ie. Christian Mysticism], he describes Christian Platonism as having "very honourable traditions, which came to life again at the Renaissance, but really reaches back to the Greek Fathers, to St. Paul and St. John, and back further still."[482] If the divine light is not exclusive to Christians, the thoughts of other wise writers may benefit the Christian apprehension of eternal truth. As Marks describes it:

> "By cultivating the vestiges of natural light, 'the better sort of heathen'... perceived many truths; and Christians, for whom the natural light was rekindled by Christ, could profit from reading heathen works, above all from reading the Platonic wisdom which flowed ultimately from the Mosaic fountain."[483]

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[481] *C.* I. 37.

[482] W. R. Inge.*The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought*. p. 7, 33. Inge's "back further still" may allude to the hermetic works such as those attributed to Hermes Trismegistus as well as the Pre-Christian writings of Plato and the work of Plotinus, Proclus, etc..

[483] Marks. op. cit. p. 527.

So, where "True Philosophy" is the convergence of divine light, reason and experience,[484] we may have confidence to say with Simon Patrick that "True *Philosophy* can never hurt sound *Divinity*".[485] Along with Plato, we may be convinced of the importance of human reason. Indeed, we may come to see that the religious life and the life of reason are one. This, according to Wade, is the greatest debt Traherne owes to Plato:

> "The greatest debt of Traherne to Plato and his followers lies not in various ideas he borrows, important as these are, but in the support their philosophy afforded to his own experience that the religious life is the reasonable life: indeed, the only reasonable life; and that reason will guide a man right to the top of the ladder that leads to communion with God."[486]

That this very communion with the divine should sometimes involve the human in irrational or 'unreasonable' experiences causes Wade no concern whatsoever.

> "If at the top there come experiences that are unutterable, these are not contrary to reason; reason is at its highest pitch when it merges with all the rest into a mode of awareness for which language has no name. That harmonizing of the whole personality into a unity no longer conscious of its multiplicity is something all the great mystics have known. It is, they tell us, a mode of being akin to the divine, it is to be love: it is to be mind. 'We shall be Mentes as he is Mens, we being of the some mind with Him who is an infinite, eternal Mind,' as Traherne expresses it once."[487]

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[484] Whilst the body of the Platonic tradition would support Traherne's combination of divine light, reason, and experience, it would not on the whole, give as much weight to experience as Traherne does. Traherne's insistence on the primacy of what instinct and intuition taught him in his early experiences of childhood is unique amongst the writers of the period and the genre. Something similar is seen again much later in the imagination of Wordsworth -- a connection noted by Inge (*The Platonic Tradition* pp.66,73,) and Hilda Vaughan in her introduction of the *Centuries* (Faith Press, 1975. p. xii.) amongst others.

[485] S.P. *Brief Account*, p. 24.

[486] Wade, *Thomas Traherne*, p.220.

[487] Wade, *Thomas Traherne*, pp. 220-221.

This is not 'reason' as we are used to recognising it. Certainly there is logic, the application of deduction to a collection of facts. But the "true reason" of Traherne and of the Platonists,[488] like the "True *Philosophy*" defended by Patrick above, is of a particular kind. It is not just pure logic, which Henry More disparagingly refers to as "*dry Reason*"[489], but a kind of quest, and a resolve "to follow truth whenever it may appear"[490] which is described in the language of sensory experience. Several times Smith uses the terms 'sensating' or 'sensation' when writing on the nature of God and the way to attain knowledge of the divine. For him true reason is "an internal sensating Faculty" by which one "can tast and discern how near any thing comes to" the divine. And religious truth is "something rather to be understood by a *Spiritual sensation*, then by any *Verbal description*."[491] According to Smith the soul has its own facility for sensing[492] which he finds it most effective to discuss using the language of physical sensation. 'See', 'hear', taste', 'touch' are the form he uses to record what the soul must do. Our search for the

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[488] Derivative of Plato's νους.

[489] Henry More, *Divine Dialogues...The Two Last Dialogues* (London, 1668) Dialogue 5, p. 403.

[490] Whichcote, *Works*, I, Discourse 22, 355.

[491] Smith, "The Existence and Nature of God", *Select Discourses*, p. 138. and "The True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge", *Select Discourses*, p. 2.

[492] "The Soul itself hath its own sense, as well as the Body : and therefore *David*, when he would teach us how to know what the divine Goodness is, calls not for *Speculation* but *Sensation*, *Tast and see how good the Lord is*." John Smith, *Select Discourses*, London: 1660. p. 3.

divine cannot be limited to the intellectual pursuit which scholarship offers, but must extend further, the soul stretching inwardly, as the body does outwardly, in living motion:

> "To seek our Divinity meerly in Books and Writings, is *to seek the living among the dead*: we doe but in vain seek God many times in these, where his Truth too often is not so much *enshrin'd*, as *entomb'd* : no; *intra te quaere Deum*, seek for God within thine own soul; he is best discern'd, ... as Plotinus phraseth it, by and *Intellectual touch* of him. We must *see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, and our hands must handle the word of life*, that I may express it in S. *John's* words...."[493]

Similarly, More admonished his reader to "feel and smell out... what is right & true, and what false and perverse..." by "Divine Sagacity"[494]. In this approach to the divine, the soul imitates the body's apprehension of reality. Traherne, too, uses the language of physical sensation to describe the soul's pursuit of the divine.[495] His constant references to sight are mirrored in the writings of Sterry who also frequently used the imagery of "spiritual senses" and particularly of "the spiritual eye"[496]. For him, as for Traherne, truest vision comes from reaching through sense to a world beyond sense. We apply what we already practice of the body's way of knowing to the action of our souls, and are led from what we know physically to a way of knowing which is spiritual. This comes near to the Plotinian concept of religion as essentially instinctive rather than dogmatic in which, for example, the musician, the lover and the metaphysician are all led on their

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[493] Smith, op. cit. p.3.

[494] *Divine Dialogues*, 5th Dialogue. p. 404.

[495] C. I. 21., 63., 72. among many others.

[496] Pinto, op. cit. p. 115.

journey to the Good by what they already instinctively love.[497] However where Plotinus denies the essential enduring reality of the physical world, Traherne affirms the physical with his whole heart. The world is where God is. Therefore all experience, all 'sense' matters. This notion of the importance of 'sense' recurs in Traherne's poetry in which he *is* his sense: "The Sense its self was I" he writes, and before his fall into the ways of custom, his soul was his "only All.. [he] was an inward Sphere of Light,/ .. All Life and Sence,/ A naked, simple, pure Intelligence."[498] Here sense and intelligence are two faces of the same soul, poised in unity rather than in opposition. It is as though sense is a kind of high reason in which the whole person is integrated in the quest for truth. Logic is not denied but married to experience so that the resulting way of seeing is neither pure mental discipline, nor utter abandon to sense and to experience, but an infusion of the two. G.R.Cragg describes Neoplatonic 'reason' as having a "twofold meaning" -- "On the one hand it meant the discipline of thinking exactly and philosophically about the things which were Real. On the other hand it involved the unification of the whole personality in the pursuit of truth."[499] For Traherne this meant a reverential study of everything -- the world as God's temple and his template or pattern by which he is known.

> "He that Knows the Secrets of Nature with Albertus Magnus, or the Motions of the Heavens with Galilao, or the Cosmography of the Moon with Hevelius, or the Body of Man with Galen,

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[497] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Tractate III, 2.

[498] "My Spirit" l. 5. and "The Preparative' ls.11,15,19-20.

[499] *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, 1950). pp.42-43. Cragg continued to hold this view of Neo-Platonist reason, writing almost exactly the same words 12 years later in *The Church and the Age of Reason*, p. 68.

> or the Nature of Diseases with Hippocrates, or the Harmonies in Melody with Orpheus, or of Poesie with Homer, or of Grammer with Lilly, or of whatever els with the greatest Artist; He is nothing if he Knows them meerly for Talk or idle Speculation, or Transeunt and External Use. But He that Knows them for Valu, and Knows them His own: shall Profit infinitly. And therfore of all Kind of Learnings, Humanity and Divinity are the most Excellent." ... "By Humanity we search into the Powers and Faculties of the Soul" and "into the Excellencies of Humane Nature" ... "In Divinity we are entertained with all Objects from Everlasting to Everlasting: ... being to Contemplat GOD."[500]

So he would begin with 'humanity' and 'divinity' and go on to natural philosophy interpreting the term with latitude to include both 'humanity ' and 'divinity' and everything in heaven and on earth:

> "Natural Philosophy teaches us the Causes and Effects of all Bodies simply and in them selvs. But if you extend it a little further, to that indeed which its Name imports, signifying the Lov of Nature, it leads us into a Diligent inquisition into all Natures, their Qualities, Affections, Relations, Causes and Ends, so far forth as by Nature and Reason they may be Known. And this Noble Science, as such is most Sublime and Perfect, it includes all Humanity and Divinity together GOD, Angels, Men, Affections, Habits, ... as well as Material and visible Things....it Openeth the Riches of Gods Kingdom, and the Nature of His Territories Works and Creatures in a Wonderfull Maner, *Clearing and preparing the Ey of the Enjoyer.*"[501]

Traherne cannot escape the image of the light, vision, the eye. All this learning of the material world, humanity and divinity serve one end -- clearing and preparing the eye of the enjoyer. In the study of the natural world, 'Humanity' and 'Divinity' come together, the material and the immaterial conjoin[502] and so 'God's Kingdom' comes, in effect, in

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[500] C. *III.* 41,42,43.

[501] *C.* III. 44. (italics mine).

[502] Here Traherne departs from the mainstream of Neo-platonic thought in which, according to Plotinus, the Sensible world and the Intelligible world (ἐκεῖ) remain distinct and in opposition despite being bound together by 'participation'. (*Enneads*, II. 4, 4, 8; III. 8, 11, 36; IV. 8, 1, 49; VI. 5, 2, 8-16.).

the mind of the enjoyer.[503] By appreciating the wonder and beauty inherent in the creation, the sight of the physical eye facilitates the inner vision whereby eternal truths are known.

Traherne's many recurring references to sight are supplemented by other related imagery: reflections in mirrors, in water, the light of stars, moon, sun. This imagery he held in common with the Cambridge Platonist, Peter Sterry who also drew his imagery from Platonic and Neoplatonic sources. Both men use the reflective imagery of water and of mirrors in conjunction with the image of the human eye.[504] In Traherne's "Shadows in the Water" and "On Leaping Over the Moon", in which what is below shows one what is above; the other world, which he sees reflected in a puddle or in a body of water, is real. It is a world "To which [he] shall, when that thin skin/ Is broken, be admitted in."[505] The mirror does more than reflect; it opens a way into another reality. It is as if his mirror not only reflects, but projects him forward towards that other world as well. The impossibility of this paradox does not disturb Traherne; indeed, his work abounds in paradox. In the *Centuries* he sees "Everyone sole Heirs as well as you." (*C*.I.29.); according to his poetry, "a learned and a happy Ignorance" was his in infancy ("Eden", l.1.); he loved to meditate on "Things Strange yet Common; Incredible, yet Known; Most

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[503] Enjoying the world is one of Traherne's most well-known themes and one on which much has been written. Recent works include Graham Dowell's *Enjoying the World: the Rediscovery of Thomas Traherne*, London: Mowbray (1990); Mlineck's "Enjoying God: the neglected center of Thomas Traherne's Centuries of Meditation." an MA thesis University of South Florida (1992).

[504] See Pinto, chs. 2, 3. This imagery of eye and mirror in Traherne is taken up by Marks, "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists", and DeNeef to whom we will refer in chapter 5.

[505] "Shadows..." ll. 79-80.

High, yet Plain; infinitly Profitable, but not Esteemed" (*C*.I.3.), to name a few. As Marks notes, "From the paradox that by looking down into a reflector man sees above, there came forth a whole cluster of images involving mirrors, wells, reflections in water, abysses, the antipodes."[506] In true Platonic form, visual perception links one to the ultimate reality via image or reflection. These images of reflection and circulation have implications for Traherne's doctrine of communication to which we will return in chapter five; here our concern is simply open eyes, right sight, the divine light, apprehension. The eye leads to the source, as Sterry himself noted: "The same Word in Hebrew signifies the *Eye*, and a *Fountain*."[507] The image of the eye leads to light, light to sun, the sun to the notion of circles and thereby eternity. One image draws into the other, and all are variant images of the divine. Thus, when Sterry writes of Love, the divine, he uses the image of irradiating light. Believing that God's nature was love and so praising all forms of love, he wrote that these other forms nevertheless "vanish, as imperfect Things, like Shadows or Stars, at the Presence of the Day, when Love shineth forth... Love itself takes in every form of Light,"[508] Here Sterry's Love is abstract, the ideal in the face of which earthly manifestations of love are but shadows; it is the centre of purest idealism. Traherne was not such an idealist, and his frequent departures from the abstract requirements of pure

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[506] Marks, "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists", p. 533. For examples of such images see "Fulness", "My Spirit", "The Vision", "The Preparative", etc. Here I do no more than note the imagery, the importance of this imagery of reflection as part of Traherne's theory of communication will be discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

[507] *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man*, (London, 1683). p. 141.

[508] *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel, and the Gospel Change* (London,1710), pp. 207-208.

idealism are one of the features of his thought which mark him as different from the true Platonist. Traherne, "who, with his exuberant homocentricity," as Marks describes him, "could not be a consistent idealist,"[509] whilst sharing Sterry's imagery of light and of sight and of love, insists on a physical actualisation of that divine love. Traherne's love must have its objects and treasures. Whilst having much in common with the Cambridge Platonists in their search for renewed vision and their faith in the divine light, whilst asserting, like them, that our "Mistakes are Ocular"[510], Traherne is not quite of their number. Traherne's vision is always set not on transcendence into intelligibility, but on the treasures immediately in front of him. When Traherne writes, "Methinks, O Lord, when I first saw Light in the Obscurity of the World's Being, it was like a Torch in some dark House"[511] his need of light both corporeal and spiritual is real so that he may see his wants. The correction of errors begins with renewed vision, but the search for treasure is what drives the change.

Traherne's treasures, those prized objects that are so much the subject of Traherne's pen,[512] are ultimately necessary because they are so much more than riches. They are his

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[509] Marks, op. cit. p. 533.

[510] *C*.IV.15.

[511] *MSD*. p. 13.

[512] Guffy records 78 entries under 'treasure' or 'treasures' for the poetry alone. (Guffy, *A Concordance to the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.) This is before we add any poems from the *Commmentaries of Heaven*, *Select Meditations*, or *The Kingdom of* God. To this would then have to be added his prose discussion of the subject of treasure from the *Centuries, Select Meditations, Christian Ethicks, The Kingdom of God, Inducements to Retiredness, Commentaries of Heaven*, and *Seeds of Eternity*.

clearest expression of want and worth. In them we see the usefulness and beauty which make his treasures objects of desire. In them we find our wants -- what we need and what we desire -- met by the bounty of divine providence. In the service of treasure, want may be creative and enabling: God found it "requisite to multiply our Wants, that our Treasures might be multiplied"[513]. In the pursuit of true treasure sight may be renewed as custom is unlearned and the divine light is rekindled. To seek true treasure, then, is to enter into the heart of desiring where what we prize is what we have righteously apprehended and esteemed and what we will rightly choose and do. This is why treasure can be seen as both means and end[514]. Traherne's treasures are not mere baubles and gew-gaws, not even the finest works of cloth and gold. To speak of treasure in Traherne is to speak seriously about questions of worth and value, questions that go deep into the heart of what we are, what we desire and what we may become as human beings. What is more, to enjoy true treasure is to participate in that divine dynamic of gift and receipt by which God is glorified.[515] With this high view of treasure in mind, Traherne may be justified in admonishing his reader to "Be serious in enjoying Treasure as Christ was in Redeeming the World."[516]

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[513] *KOG* 361r.

[514] Traherne describes treasure as "by nature those precious Things,which are Means whereby we acquire our Ends, or those Things which we most Esteem, as the Sovereign Objects of our Joy" *CE*. p.68.

[515] The enjoyment of treasure and the manifestation of glory are "coincident" according to Traherne, "for the World is his treasure only for the sake of his Glory." *SM*. II. 31

[516] *SM*.II.97.

Chapter 4: Choice

Just as the subject of treasure in Traherne touches upon profound questions of worth and value, so the subject of choice raises questions of liberty and grace. This chapter begins with *Roman Forgeries* as a defense of liberty and proceeds to consider human freedom as part of the image of God in man and to explore the notion of man as 'the Golden Link'. Who we are as humans and what we may become is bound up with choice, the freedom to make choices and the kinds of choices we make. And so the chapter moves on to consider power and act, potentiality and actuality. Traherne's debate on election and free will in *A Sober View* is a part of this discussion as is his work in *Christian Ethicks* and *The Kingdom of God* where questions of moral goodness and virtue arise. Behind all of these choices lies desire. "The deliberate refusal to allow desire and choice to be separate was one of the main inspirations of seventeenth century religious art and poetry" writes Staley, "But it seems to be clear to Traherne that as soon as the separation is sanctioned, the beauty begins to go out of religion and the certitude out of art." [517]. Where sight is the foundation of desire, choice is that desire's manifestation. It is in our choices that we exercise desire, that desire becomes in some sense visible. And so the chapter ends with hope – that "Vertue mixt of Belief and Desire" by which we both choose and are stirred up to action, a virtue which stands in the cusp of potential and actual, linking what is envisioned with what is enjoyed.

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[517] Staley, "The Theocentric Vision of Thomas Traherne", *Cithara*, IV(November, 1964): 43-48. P.44. Staley sees this as Traherne's "normal and considered position, and examples of his adherence to this view of the inseparability of choice and desire occur again and again in his poetry and prose."

In Defense of Liberty:

In his chapter on holiness in *Christian Ethicks* Traherne writes: "To make Creatures infinitely free and leave them to their Liberty is one of the Best of all Possible Things; and so necessary that no Kingdome of Righteousness could be without it."[518]

and the importance of liberty is a theme to which he returns again and again at various stages in his work. Words such as 'liberty', 'free will' and 'voluntary' are not, for him, tied up with righteousness alone but with his whole concept of man. Who we are and what we may become is intimately connected with freedom. It is entirely consistent then, that his understanding of church -- both its history and its practise -- should concern itself, in part, with freedom. And so this chapter begins in a somewhat unlikely place, with *Roman Forgeries*.

I use the term 'unlikely' because it is not immediately apparent how *Roman Forgeries* is concerned with freedom and because *Roman Forgeries* has often been considered an outside text[519]: its style is polemical, its arguments are technical, its content highly specialised. Apart from the biographical interest in his encounter with a papist in its introduction, it has been largely regarded as unapproachable. At best it represents a

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[518] *CE*.p.90-91.

[519] "It is impossible not to feel that Traherne was wasting his genius in its composition." declares Dobell (xlvii) and that, or something similar, has been the view of the majority of critics in the twentieth century. In its own day, however, the text may have enjoyed a certain amount of popularity. It is a more common book than *Christian Ethicks*, and in its day it captured sufficient attention to earn Traherne a place amongst the distinguished graduates of Oxford.

Traherne with whom we are not familiar.[520] Something has been made, by Stewart and Wade, of the text as evidence of Traherne's scholarliness, but for the most part we have not known what to do with it. In it Traherne seeks to prove that certain records of church councils[521] have been falsified and that the authority of the Roman church is therefore flawed. Undergirding all this scholarly digging is his belief that 'The Supremacy of the Roman Church was a meer usurption, begun by Ambition, advanced by Forgery, and defended by Cruelty."[522] *Roman Forgeries* is a work with a particular and unashamed aim.

Traherne begins the work by discussing "the Nature, Degrees, and Kinds of Forgery" beginning with the beggar who forges "only to satisfie his Hunger" and moving through the "Leafe, Bond, Will or Deed" which is "the greater", on to the forging of an instrument "in the *Kings* Name" or his seal which is High Treason. According to Traherne, "The Highest degree of Forgery is that of altering the *Holy Scriptures*; because the Majesty offended being Infinite, as well as the Concernment, the Crime is the more heinous"[523]. Second only to that is the forging of rules and councils or the putting of

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[520] As Stewart, who has done the most complete study of *RF* to date admits, it reveals "a stridency of character not at all consistent with the current stereotype of Traherne," (*TEV*, p.17.)

[521] Traherne lists in his "Advertisement to the Reader", "*Apostles Canons*, *Decretal Epistles*, and *Ancient Councils*;" as those things "which they have either depraved by altering the Text, or falsified, as it were, by Whole-Sale, in intire Lump." (*RF*, B6v).

[522] *RF*, "A Premonition" A7v. Here Traherne is quoting Stillingfleet. Authorial marginalia notes "Dr. Stil sermon on Acts 24.17 p.45". As Day notes (*TT*, p. 89 and note 3) this sermon was actually on Acts 24:14 and more importantly was preached on September 21, 1673, which dates *RF* later than has been posited by Wade, Margoliouth and others.

[523] This and the preceding quotations in this paragraph are from *RF* p. 1-3 (C3r-C4r).

words into the mouths of the apostles, martyrs and fathers (an act which Traherne calls "fathering upon"[524]). He writes:

> "The highest, next under that, is to counterfeit *Rules* in the Names of the *Apostles*, *Oecumenical Councils*, most glorious *Martyrs*, and Primitive *Fathers*, that is, to make *Canons, Letters, Books*, and *Decrees* in their Names, of which they were not the Authors."[525]

This goes to the heart of the matter since, "If the Church of *Rome* be guilty of this Crime, her *Antiquity* and *Tradition*, the two great Pillars upon which she standeth, are very rotten, and will moulder into nothing."[526] We may see then, that *Roman Forgeries* is a work that is clearly focussed. Its concern is church authority. Its subject is forgery--those things purporting to be truth that are in fact falsification. But his underlying belief is in the power of truth; a belief that he expects his reader to share.

That the lie can never be as strong as the truth is his firm conviction, suggested in such lines as : "If Lyes were always consistent, *Truth* would be amazed." and "Could a Lye shun all inconvenience, and see to its Interest on every side, it would be as wise and perfect as Truth itself."[527]. This tangle of truth and untruth is exactly the context in which *Roman Forgeries* is written. How does one determine theological truth amidst competing

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[524] This term is used in *RF* chs. 13, 15, 18, 24.

[525] *RF* p.3 (C4r).

[526] *RF* p.3 (C4r).

[527] This and the previous quote are from *RF*.p.302(appendix). This belief in the strength of Truth may be found elsewhere in Traherne's work eg. "For Truth is in its own Nature as Bright as the Sun, and discipateth all the Errors, discovereth all the fallacies and scattereth all the oppositions in the World. It Feedeth on Difficulties and gathereth Strength by objections." (*Sober View* 44v). And it is akin to his belief in the strength of virtue which is manifest most clearly in his editorial decision to omit vice as a subject in *CE*

claims of various churches and churchmen? Donne asked the same question in his third *Satyre*-- "Seeke true religion. O where?"[528]. Equally unsatisfied with Rome, Geneva and the protestant preachers of his own country, he writes:

> "To adore, or scorne an image, or protest,
> May all be bad ; doubt wisely ; in strange way
> To stand inquiring right, is not to stray ;
> To sleepe, or runne wrong, is. On a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must goe:[529]

The same question burns in Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*[530]. For Traherne, the answer came, in some part, from the study of texts. He believed, along with other theologians of the reformation period, that religious faith could never be secure until founded on reason. Therefore, decisions cannot be reached in the church by any means which forecloses discussion and obviates the need for reason. In *Roman Forgeries* his assumption is that objective argument should be used and disputes settled much as legal ones might have been, and much of this particular work is set up as a kind of trial of religion[531]. The metaphor of a trial is a particularly interesting one in this case, appearing, as it does, in a greater context of political and religious contest.

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[528] Donne, Satyre III. l.43.

[529] Satyre III. ll. 76-81.

[530] See especially part I where he discusses heresies and philosophies.

[531] For more detail on the comparison between theological and legal disputes see Stewart pp. 27-28. Note also that Traherne concludes his final chapter with words that make his reader the jury: "I leave it to the Judgement of every Christian, what *Antiquity* or *Tradition* she can have, that is guilty of such a Crime," (*RF* p. 297).

For Traherne, the authority of the Church and the authority of the state are related; and the usurpation of the liberty of one taints the freedom of the other. As Stewart point out, "Comparison between legal and theological procedures suggests the religious constraints on a parishioner amount to invasion of his rights as a citizen."[532] In a sense Traherne's claims to theological liberty suggest an appeal to civic liberty as well. The church, as the individual, must find that its freedom comes from within. As Traherne so clearly states: "no force of External Power can make us free; whatever it is invades our Liberty, destroys it."[533]

Traherne saw the centralisation of power in Rome as just such an invasion. Whereas at the time of the Nicene Council the bishop of Rome was "expressly noted to be equal to that of the other Patriarchs"[534], he later "invaded the Jurisdiction of his Fellow-Patriarchs"[535]. Both Protestant and Catholic Christians view the Nicene Council as speaking with lasting authority so it is not surprising that it is this council that is most powerfully represented in *Roman Forgeries*. Traherne had great faith in the early councils; what he so strongly objected to were the later alterations and additions, those things that were "fathered upon" the Councils, that turned the workings of a council into the decrees from on high. The early councils are his reference point, not because he is

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[532] Ibid.

[533] *CE*.p.93.

[534] *RF* p.8.

[535] *RF*. p.10. The second chapter of *RF* deals with the falsification of the gift of Constantine which he sees as the "The first Popish Encroachment upon" "The Primitive Order and Government of the Church" (see title of chapter 2, p.7).

harking back to, as Stewart suggests, a time of primitive unity in which all members agreed[536], but to a time of primitive cooperation in which all members discussed. The truth of the church was Scripture interpreted by a council of equals who had reached a consensus. According to this means of government, each member of the council exercised reason and choice in the taking of their decision; and when this system was overridden something of that choice was lost. Take for instance, the case of the outcast member, the excommunicate, dealt with in the fifth canon of the Nicene Council. As Stewart points out, the outcast member had the right of appeal twice a year (once before *Quadregesima* and once about the middle of Autumn)[537]. According to Stewart, "In the early church, bishops gathered to assure by their common voice that any eccentric judgement of a local church official could not bar a member of the congregation from Easter communion. Ideally, such decisions represented not secular power but communal judgement: the reasoned opinion of the congregation"[538], and it was this consensus that gave the councils their authority. It is perhaps this communality of reasoned voice that appealed to Traherne as much as the Council's antiquity. Certainly it was the overthrow of this fifth canon, when the pope received appeals from excommunicated members of other dioceses, and in so doing exchanged the communal voice for the personal one, that

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[536] Stewart, *TEV*, p. 19: "the primitive condition of the church was one of utopian unity and order".

[537] See Stewart, p. 32-33 where he cites Sig. A4v-A5 of the Council.

[538] Stewart, *TEV*, p.33. Stewart recognises the importance of consensus in the process of truth-finding when he writes: "The value of the councils rested in their recognition of human frailty and in their abiding humility." (Ibid.)

riled Traherne[539]. To Traherne, the voice of the Council had been supplanted by the voice of the one and consensus had been replaced with mandate. This power of excommunication is made most ridiculous to Traherne at the Sixth Council of Carthage when all of Africa was excommunicated. From then on to the Reformation, church history is, for him, "the unfolding drama of a developing tyranny, perpetuating itself by the bondage of the people's ignorance, by intimidating, silencing, or burning all dissenters."[540] Again the issues are ones of that liberty which is necessary to choice, and again the theological and civic boundaries are blurred. When he writes of the evils done by "Jesuitical Souls" he lists amongst their practices:

> "Poysoning Emperours, Murdering Kings, attempting on Queens, their Massacre at *Paris*, the Gunpowder-Treason,&c. The *Instruments* of which Acts, are by such Records rather favoured than discouraged; and some of them Canonized, rather than punished in the See of *Rome*."[541]

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[539] The pope did not receive appeals from laity alone, as Traherne outlines: "Yet when persons were Immorigerous, if any Bishop were censured by his Metropolitan, or Priest excommunicated by his Bishop, or Deacon offended with his Superior, who chastised him for his guilt; though the Canon of the Church was trampled under foot thereby (which forbad such irregular and disorderly flights) the manner was, for those turbulent persons to flee to *Rome*, ... and the Roman Bishop trampling the Rule under foot, as well as others, did (as is confessed) frequently receive them."(p.10) His outrage at this seems to increase as he writes... "*Rome* became an *Asylum*, or City of *Refuge*, for discontented persons; disturbing the Order of the Church, spoiling the Discipline of other Provinces, and hindering the Course of Justice; while her Bishop usurped an Authority, which neither *Scripture* nor *Canon* gave unto him," (p.11). It is interesting to note that amongst his grievances listed above he notes the perversion of justice, again drawing parallels between theological and legal disputes. His anger continues on until he likens the rise of the pope's supremacy to the legend of Sappho who, wanting to be a god, trained birds "to say *Μεγαζ Θεοζ δ Σαφω* : Sappho *is a great God:*" before letting them loose to teach all the other birds the same. According to Traherne the pope's birds are his priests, and seminaries the captivity in which they are taught to sing. The story serves "for an *Embleme* of the Pope's Atchievement," writes Traherne, "who by this means has made the World to ring of a Doctrine which makes him a God; or if not that, at least Lord of all *Councils*, greater than Emperours, Head of the Church, e&." (p.38).

[540] Stewart, op cit. p. 39.

[541] *RF*.p.316 (appendix).

To Traherne, the centralisation of ecclesiastical power was no less than theological and cultural invasion and his defense against Rome is an attempt to claim back a voice and with that voice the liberty of choice.

His argument about forgery is really where his defense of the communal voice and his faith in the power of the text are married. It is an argument about freedom. How can one discover theological truth without freedom to discuss and without free access to accurate texts? The forgeries and falsifications against which he rails are not just fabrications, they are restrictions. They are about records lost, records forged, texts 'chained up' and expurgated, bought up and burned[542]. They are about his own ecclesiastical history rewritten and the authority of his church invaded -- intellectual and ecclesiastical bondage.

It is precisely in its defense of intellectual and ecclesiastical freedom that we may see *Roman Forgeries* not as a text isolated from the rest of the canon by its polemical voice, but as a text which is linked to all the rest by its fundamental assertions. Like right sight, which is in turn the basis of righteous apprehension, right prizing, treasure and eventually felicity, this defense of freedom is fundamental. For without the intellectual and ecclesiastical freedom that *Roman Forgeries* asserts, Traherne's other themes could find no home. In its tone, *Roman Forgeries* heeds the admonition of *Christian Ethicks* that passion be prudent by matching vehemence with degree of importance of its subject matter. In its quest for right knowledge and his assumption that knowledge liberates, it

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[542] See, for example, the *Advertisement to the Reader* (*RF*, B5v-B6r) in which they "buy up the Editions" and "endeavored to corrupt" by "their Indices Expurgatorii."

affirms what he also explores in various forms in his poetry and his poetic prose. Even his polemical tone is not unique. The kind of language he uses in *Roman Forgeries* appears again in the *Centuries*[543], and it should be no surprise that the two situations in which we find Traherne's most vehement language are these two. As he rails in *Roman Forgeries* against the bondage of the mind by the falsification of records, so he rails, in the *Centuries* against the bondage of 'Custom'-- also a bondage of mind by the falsification of evident truth. Traherne firmly believed that with sight and liberty the human soul could grow into fullness. This fundamental belief is the basis of *Roman Forgeries* as it is of all of his work

We may see then that there is more to *Roman Forgeries* than a search for textual accuracy and clever argument. To miss this point is to miss observing Traherne at his most fundamental. According to Stewart, "The assumptions of *Roman Forgeries* lead Traherne toward the hostile terrain of secularism. If accepted fully-- if all man needed to make him happy were accurate texts and neatly framed arguments -- one had no legitimate quarrel with the archsecularist Thomas Hobbes."[544] Here Stewart falls into the same trap of Botrall and others who assume that Traherne's emphasis on right

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[543] In *RF* he calls the council of Carthage "audacious *Guesses*" (p.129), claiming "The more you stir this business, the more it stinks" (p.130). Ch. 18 ends "Surely the feet upon which this Peacock stands, are very Black..."(p.214) and he concludes his final chapter by suggesting that the Roman Church, a "Mother of Lyes", "espoused to the Father of Lies", has produced an "adulterate brood" and so is "defiled with so great an Off-spring of notorious *Impostures*."(p.297)---- Similarly strong language is used against Custom, those "Barbarous Opinions, and Monstrous Apprehensions, which we Nick Name Civility and the Mode" (*C*.III.12) which "put Grubs and Worms in Mens Heads that ...eat out all their Happiness." (*C*.III.13); by Custom he is swallowed up "in the Miserable Gulph of idle talk and worthless vanities," (*C*.III.14)

[544] Stewart, p.29-30.

apprehension means that for him correct knowledge or perception is enough.[545] The authenticity of arguments and texts in *Roman Forgeries* are important precisely because they are the beginning rather than the end; they may prove what is not true, but they do not sufficiently answer what is. It is in this sense that right Knowledge, although it is the correct starting point, is never enough. From it right action proceeds, for it is knowledge plus choice that equals redemption in Traherne; the knowledge must be translated into act. Man's power to act is reliant upon his power to choose. It is part of the Imago Dei that man should have this freedom and so, in defending the liberty of text and the authority of several voices, Traherne is not only defending the authority of his church but the image of God in all humanity as well.

The Golden Link:

The Image of God in humanity is, of course, one of Traherne's well known themes. Adhering as it does to the Renaissance tradition of man as the centre of the universe and the pinnacle of creation, Traherne's high view of humanity is, in one sense, nothing new. But for Traherne this doctrine is more than a humanist ideal; it is the pivotal point of redemption, for it is in the incarnation, in which God becomes man that man may become divine, that Traherne's redemption finds its roots. The universe is the theatre of redemption, and each person is a player with an unwritten script, capable of choices, whose thoughts and actions have eternal significance. What the human does matters to others and to God and to the proper or improper employment of all creation:

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[545] "It is in terms of recovery of vision, rather than conquest of sin, that he discusses the restoration of man to spiritual wholeness." (Botrall, *The Way To Blessedness*, p.6).

"By this you may see, that the Works or Actions flowing from your own Liberty are of Greater Concernment to you than all that could possibly happen besides. And that it is more to your Happiness what you are, then what you enjoy. Should God giv him self and all Worlds to you, and you refuse them, it would be to no purpose. Should he lov you and magnify you, should he giv his Son to Dy for you and command all Angels and Men to lov you, should he Exalt you in his Throne, and giv you Dominion over all his Works, and you neglect them it would be to no purpose. Should he make you in his Image, and employ all his Wisdom and Power to fill Eternity with Treasures, and you despise them it would be in vain. In all these Things you hav to do; and therfore your Actions are great and Magnificent, ...While all Creatures stand in Expectation what will be the result of your Liberty."[546]

All creatures stand in expectation of our liberty. It is in this sense that human liberty gives its weight to the redemption drama. For without liberty no action could be righteous and no actor useful.

> "For in every Kingdome there are subjects capable of Laws, and Rewards, and Punishments. And these must be free Agents. There is no Kingdome of Stones ncr of Trees, nor of Stars; only a Kingdome of Men and Angels. Who were they divested of their Liberty would be reduced to the estate of Stones and Trees; neither capable of Righteous Actions, nor able to Honor, or to Love, or praise: without which Operations all inferior Creatures and meer Natural Agents would be totally Useless."[547]

But Traherne takes his praise of liberty further. Not only does human liberty exalt the individual human to the realms of righteous action, but human liberty also has divine ends. Human liberty glorifies God. It does so because as a free agent, the human can return (or withhold) obedience and praise. This occasions the possibility of a perfect creation reflected or returned by creatures who become themselves creative, and in so doing introduces a dynamic of mutuality into creation[548]. Thus through the liberty of man, God may attain more than he attained by the use of his own liberty alone:

> "He seemeth to hav made as many things depend upon Mans Liberty, as his own... When all that could be wrought by the Use of His own Liberty were attained, by Mans Liberty He

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[546] *C*.IV 48.

[547] *CE*.p.91.

[548] This notion of mutuality is discussed more fully in chapter five under the heading "Circulation and Communication".

> attained more. This is Incredible, but Experience will make it Plain. By his own Liberty he could but Creat Worlds and giv himself to creatures Make Images and endow them with faculties, or seat them in Glory. But to see them Obedient, or to enjoy the Pleasure of their Amity and Praises, to make them Fountains of Actions like his own (without which indeed they could not be Glorious) or to enjoy the Beauty of their free Imitation, this could by no means be, without the Liberty of his Creatures intervening ....In Creating Liberty therfore and giving it to his Creatures he Glorified All Things: Himself, his Works, and the Subjects of His Kingdom."[549]

The enjoying of creation and the giving of praise which Traherne mentions above is a theme to which he returns many times. And it is enjoying the world that is man's unique employment. Traherne's angels may choose, they may obey or disobey, but, being bodiless, they cannot enjoy the physical world. It is man alone who can taste and return praise for the pleasures of the created world.

> "Now Angels can Adore, Giv Thanks and lov. Yet without the Interposure and mediation of man cannot enjoy this Adspectable world, for haveing no Bodies, no smell, no feeling, sight, Eys or Eares, no need of Aire meat or Drink, all is Superflous to the Selves, as it is to God. Till man be made."[550]

The importance of the human body for the enjoying of creation is emphasised again and again in Traherne's writings as is the superiority of human bodiliness over angelic bodilessness[551]. With David, Traherne sees the human as 'a little lower than the

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[549] *C.* IV.46

[550] *SM.*III.9.

[551] In praise of the human body see Traherne's extended treatment in day six of *Meditations on the Six Days of Creation* in which, amongst many other praises of the body Traherne asserts that God super-added something to his Image in creating it. See also "Our bodies are not, as som Imagine them, enemies to be used, with all Kind of Rigor, They are vessels worthy the Treasures they inclose... since he hath left there as in a cage, the Greatest of all his Miracles, The Human Soul." (*KOG* 352v). "But Certainly the Body shall enjoy as much in Heaven, as In Hell it endureth, for it was made for pleasure, not for pain, and is most Apt and capable of that, for which it was first designed." (*KOG* 352r) and "our Human Nature is more than Angelical, because we have one way more then they, to feel, and enjoy all Objects" *(KOG* 354r). See also: "This Body is not the cloud, but a pillar assumed to manifest His love unto us. In these shades doth this sun break forth most oriently. ..God never shewed Himself more a God than when He appeared man;"

angels'[552]; that is to say, a not quite entirely spiritual being, and yet exalted high above the beast. Neither extreme, the angel or the beast, the creature that is either wholly spiritual or wholly physical, can achieve what the human can achieve[553]. Neither is able to perfect creation or to return to God the praise that he desires. And it is in fulfilling this unique role that the human surpasses an angel:

> "IF you look in to the *Nature* of Angels and Men you will find this mighty Difference between them, Angels are more Simple Spirits, Men are Images of GOD carefully put into a Beautiful Case. Their Souls would seem equal to the Angels were they not to live in Humane Bodies, and those Bodies are Superadded, certainly for unspeakable and most Glorious Ends; the visible World was made for the sake of these Bodies, and without such persons as men are, it would be utterly useless...."[554]

And so the image of God in a body is a great mystery. Rooted in both the practical usefulness and the glorification of the world, the human body has both physical and spiritual significance. Traherne is fascinated by the implications of this unique position. Again using the image of a case, Traherne calls the human position a great mystery:

> "The Image of God in a Body being the Grand mistery of all Eternity: Gods picture in a curious Case, besett with stars insteed of Jewels,"[555]

(*C*.1.90.). The fact that bodiliness matters is, moreover, reiterated in Traherne's interest in the embodiment of God himself in creation in *C*.II.20.; *SM*.IV.34.; and *KOG* chapter 27.

[552] Man is "made as David witnesseth a little lower than the Angels." (*C*.IV.74.). What Traherne is emphasising here is not man's position in a hierarchy, but the unique ambiguity of his nature -- spiritual and physical.

[553] "Since therfore neither Angels, nor Bruits can Enjoy the World, or make it so perfect as it ought to be without the Interventions of Man" writes Traherne, man was created. (*KOG* 348r).

[554] *CE*.p.104. cf. "For our Bodies therefore was all this glorious World made, and all things therein," (*MSD* p.71).

[555] *SM* III.9. cf. "and as we put fair and curious Pictures, which we much value, into rich and costly Cases, so God implanted his Image in this Body, the Richness of the Workmanship adding to the Magnificence of the Jewel: The Beauty of the Body adorning and

This mystery of the double nature of the human person is aptly expressed in the mystery of birth, for in it the human stands between the physical and the spiritual, creating a body and giving home to a soul. In birth the human is "able to beget the Divine Image, and to multiply himself into Millions."[556] And it is in the human body, we are reminded, that God himself chose to dwell[557]. The great mystery of the double nature in man is a theme to which Traherne frequently returns, and which never ceases to amaze him.

> "For two Natures infinitly distant are united in him, no Man can tell how, after a way & Manner so Mysterious, that it is far Easier to Explicate the Nature of his Soul, & Body, & open all the Endowments of either of them apart, than to reveal the Secret, or unfold the Manner of their mysterious Union, which I dare boldly say, is the Greatest Depth in the World."[558]

The governor of all beneath him and dear to all that is above, the human is an inhabitant of both worlds, a messenger between created things and an interpreter of all of nature. Neither wholly in time nor wholly out of time, the human stands between the two, as pause, or as Traherne writes, "an interval". And so the human is a golden link:

> "A Messenger between the Creatures, Lord of Inferior things, and familiar to those abov; by the Keen[n]ess of his Sences, the Piercing of his Reason, and the Light of Knowledg, the Interpreter of Nature, A seeming Intervall between Time and Eternity, and the Inhabitant of both, the Golden link or Tie of the World, yea the Hymenæus Marrying the Creator and His Creatures together;"[559]

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commending the Image which it contains." (*MSD* p 3-74). In the beauty of the case Traherne reads a significance since "if the Case be so rich, how glorious must the Jewel be?" (*MSD* p80).

[556] *CE* p.104. In *MSD*, Traherne adds that in Eden "it was lawful and blessed to beget their Similitude; forasmuch as it was part of the divine Image conceded to them abov the Angels." (*MSD* p.73).

[557] His Body may be the Temple of GOD, and when it pleased GOD to become a Creature, he assumed the Nature of Man." (*CE* p104).

[558] *KOG* 348v

[559] C.IV.74. Here he is quoting Pico.

He is "the Head of all Things visible, and invisible, and the Golden clasp whereby Things Material and Spiritual are United."[560].

This image of the golden link or clasp, which recurs in Traherne, has its origins in the hermetical writings. In the *Kingdom of God*, Traherne cites Hermes when he writes of man again as a golden clasp in which the material and spiritual unite: "MAN was created, As the Golden Clasp (as Hermes calls him) uniting all Extremes, and as the Sovereign Head wherin all Visibles, & Invisibles are fully contented, & meet together."[561]

This is just one of many ideas, themes and images that Traherne borrows from the hermetical writings, and the link between Hermes and Traherne has been ably traced by Marks and commented on by several others[562]. Traherne's debt to Hermes is evident in completed works and notebooks alike, cropping up both in full quotes and in marginal notes, cited overtly, and infused in Traherne's themes and motifs, like that of the golden clasp above. We know that Traherne gleaned his Hermes from several sources. He read Everard's 1657 translation and Ficino's *Argumentum* to his translation of Hermes, and he cites Ficino's description of Hermes as "Primus... Theologiae Autor"[563]. It seems that he

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[560] *CE* p.104.

[561] *KOG* 348r.

[562] See Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus', *RN*, 19 (1966): 118-131; and Sandbank, "Thomas Traherne and the Place of Man in the Universe", *SH*, 17: (1966) p. 135 and note 28.

[563] Ficino, *Opera*, II (Basel, 1576), 1836. This appears in Traherne's *Ficino Notebook* on folio 58. (B.M. MS. Burney 126). Traherne's *Ficino Notebook* contains notes from the *Argumentum*. According to Sandbank, Traherne read the 1650 Everard translation which is what he follows in his long quotations from Hermes in *CE* ch. XXVIII. For evidence that Traherne also read the second edition of the Everard translation (1657) of Hermes see Marks, "Traherne's Commonplace Book", *PBSA*, p 464, n. 12.

was aware of the questions of authority and authorship raised by Casaubon's debunking (1614) of the Hermes myth, but considered that the wisdom contained in the writings was of sufficient significance to merit respect. In his *Commonplace Book* he writes:

> "Whether this Author bearing the Name of Tris. be that ancient Heathen, the Egyptian Hermes that was contemporary with Moses or som thing elder then he is a great Q.as it is also whether there were any such Hermes or no. The Mysteries seem too clear & Perspicuous & Divine for any Heathen..."

Traherne's deliberations on these questions continue but he is loathe to discard what has been regarded, by "common consent of all learned men", as venerable. Ultimately he comes to the balanced opinion that

> "However it be it is a venerable & learned Author of great esteem & Authority in the World, & by the Common Consent of all learned men, many grave & venerable Mysteries are contained in it: for the sake of which also the Work has so many Ages been esteemed Hermes."[564]

When he cites Hermes he does so in the pre-Casaubon sense of Hermes as one mind. Traherne uses several names -- sometimes he is 'Hermes' and sometimes 'Mercurius Trismegistus'[565]. Attribution in many places in the *Commonplace Book* is indicated by a simple "Tris" at the end of the relevant passage, and when Hermes appears alongside other authors, he is listed as a single person like the rest[566].

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[564] This and the preceding quotation are from *CB*, under the heading "Generation", folios 48bv.col. 2-49.col. 2.

[565] See for example *KOG* 348r and *C*.IV.74.

[566] Eg. *C* IV.74. in which Pico is cited and then Traherne writes: " Which sentence of his[Pico] is seconded by that of Mercurius Trismegistus...". ; and *CB* under the heading "God", folio 50v,col. 2: "God is an infinit & Eternal Mind, according to Trismegistus, Plato, Socrates, & others". This is also cited in Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus", *RN*, p. 119, note 6. In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne refers to Hermes in the singular person 'he' and seems to affirm the pre-Casaubon notion of Hermes as more ancient than Moses (*KOG* 332r). Though most common, this reading of Hermes is not universal since in *CE* (p 230) Traherne suggests the possibility of multiple or diverse authorship when he writes: "Trismegistus (or whoever else was the Author of that Book)...".

Ultimately, whether Hermes is one or many is a question that interests Traherne less than the more important questions of self and soul which the hermetic writings raise. For Traherne, the knowledge of one's self is of central importance. It is the foundation of virtue and the beginning of wisdom.[567] Much of what Traherne believes about the self can be traced to Hermes who went so far as to say that the soul, if it would commune with God, must be like God:

> "If therefore thou wilt not equal thy self to God, thou canst not understand GOD. For the like is intelligible by the like. Increase thy self to an immeasurable Greatness, leaping beyond every Body, and transcending all Time, become ETERNITY; And thou shalt understand GOD."[568]

Traherne admits that this is dangerous territory – the desire to be like gods was the destruction of the world. And yet, he insists, it was not in the desire but in the means of attaining it that Adam and Eve sinned. "to aspire to the Perfection in a forbidden way, was unlawful... but to know our selves, and in *the strait and divine Way* to come immediately to GOD,"[569] is right and good. It was by disobedience, by following their own inventions that our first parents sinned.

Traherne's reliance on Hermes, not just for the metaphor of the Golden Clasp, but for the view of man as the pinnacle of creation and link between the spiritual and physical that that metaphor represents, is clear. And yet, he does not take on board the hermetical

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[567] Cf. "in the knowledg of one self, the knowledg of God, and all things appeareth"(*SE* 140v); and "the knowledge of a Mans self the Foundation of Magnanimity."(*CE* p225).

[568] Traherne citing Hermes in *CE* p.226. Extended quotations from Hermes appear throughout this chapter, many of them reappearing again in *The Kingdom of God*. cf *KOG* 333r.

[569] CE p. 228. That in italics is a quote from Hermes previously cited on the preceding page in *CE*.

tradition without discrimination, and there are points upon which Traherne differs from Hermes. Hermes praises the body and yet denigrates the physical. As Marks has noted there are, throughout Hermes' *Pymander*, two strains in juxtaposition – a "dogmatic *contemptus mundi*, utterly foreign to Traherne; and an equally powerful ecstatic praise of the world and of man which agrees perfectly with Traherne's philosophy."[570]. Where Hermes is positive in his doctrine of man Traherne applauds him. Whatever contradicts this view is ignored or marginalised. This may be because he finds too many contradictions within the hermetic writings, or because he is simply doing with these writings as he does with most -- borrowing what is useful, and in some cases even glossing it to suit his argument. For instance, in *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne quotes Hermes on the power of the soul to be present by an act of understanding, but whereas Hermes is praising incorporeality, Traherne's emphasis shifts the argument slightly so that it is mere bodily presence without the spiritual presence, rather than bodiliness as a whole that is denigrated. Where Hermes praises incorporeality and nothingness: "nothing is more capacious than that which is Incorporeal, Nothing more swift, nothing more Powerfull," Traherne comments "For to be present by an Act of the Understanding, is to be purely and spiritually present, in the most Blessed and profitable manner, without which meer Bodily presence is a vain insignificant deadness; often times worse than corporeal Absence."[571] . Traherne uses Hermes to second Pico[572] or to underscore a point

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[570] Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus", p.121.

[571] This and the preceding quotation is from *KOG* 332v.

[572] *C.* IV 74.

made by one of the wise pagans such as Plato or Aristotle. The hermetic writings function as a synthesis of ideas, and Hermes stands in a kind of twilight between pagan and Christian[573], a position which is often useful to Traherne who would himself like to synthesise the works of many of the same men. From Hermes he gleaned the important notion of the omnipresence of the soul, its power to be present, by a thought, with its object that appears in his poetry and in the *Centuries*. He is quoting Hermes when he writes:

> "I conceiv, and understand not by the Sight of my eys, but by the Intellectual Operation &c. I am in Heaven, in the Earth, in the Water, in the Air, in the Living Creatures, in the plants, in the womb, evry where."[574]

and

> "He understood himself to be where his Thought was, and the secret foundation of that strange and mysterious Omnipresence, which he ascribes unto him self, is the Simplicitie of the Soul, and Power. which...when it pleaseth can in a Thought be present there, with Adam in Paradice, with Christ upon the Cross, with God in the Creation, with Moses in the Wilderness, with Noah in the Ark, with Solomon in the Temple... If it pleas, it can contract it self to the Litleness of a Sand, to a centre, and in a Moment dilate like a Flash of Lightning over all the heavens, nay full Eternity,"[575]

And so it is to Hermes that he may owe his greatest debt for his high understanding of the human person. This is so not just because of his direct readings of the hermetic writings, but also because these same writings so influenced those two later heroes of Traherne's --

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[573] Traherne says of Hermes: "This is Trismegistus that sublime and Mysterious Oracle among the Gentiles, who if he were a Heathen, was the strangest Heathen that ever the world produced," and that he is "the most ancient Writer of the World... the most venerable of all the Magi." (KOG 332r and 333v). In *CE* (p.226) he refers to Hermes simply as "the ancient Heathen' and yet asserts that what Hermes professes is "countenanced here and there in the Holy Scripture.".

[574] KOG 332r-332v.

[575] *KOG* 333v.

Ficino and Pico. To read Traherne on Hermes, Ficino and Pico is to sense an unbroken continuity in their conception of the position of man[576].

After Hermes, Ficino held that the human stood between two worlds as "the middle term of all things"[577]. Man is "such a precious part of the world that it is the mean between temporal and eternal things, since it receives the eternal and commands the temporal"[578] asserted Ficino. This could be so because, to Ficino,"there was an ontological connection between the two spheres."[579] God was in all things because all things were in Him, the divine goodness so overflowing, that it left no particle devoid of itself: "Si ergo in uno mundi corpore vivente una quodam vita unique est quod alias ostendimus multo magis unum ipsum bonum est ubique etiam extra mundum."[580]. For Ficino's concept of man this meant that the human person, too, participated in the divine. The human mind could

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[576] Witness, for instance the seamlessness with which he moves from Pico to Hermes in the *Centuries*: "Picus Mirandula admirably saith, in his Tract De Dignitate Hominis, I hav read in the Monuments of Arabia, that Abdala the Saracen being Asked, Quid in hac quasi mundana Scena admirandum maxime Spectaretur? What in this World was most Admirable?, Answered, MAN. then whom he was nothing more to be Admired. Which Sentence of his is seconded by that of Mercurius Trismegistus, Magnum, O Asclepi, Miraculum, Homo. Man is a Great and Wonderfull Miracle. Ruminating upon the Reason of these Sayings, those things did not satisfy me, which many hav spoken concerning the Excellency of Human Nature. As that man was Creaturarum Internuncius; Superis familiaris, Inferiorum Rex; sensuum perspicacia, Rationis Indagine, Intelligentiæ Lumine, Naturæ Interpres, Stabilis Ævi et fluxi Temporis Interstitium, et (qd. Persæ dicunt) Mundi Copula immo Hymenæus:" (*C.* IV.74.).

[577] Hillman on Ficino in James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, New York: Harper &Row, 1975, p.200.

[578] Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Bk. II, p.276. translated in Trinkaus, "Marsilio Ficino and the Ideal of Human Autonomy", p.142.

[579] Karen-Claire Voss, "Imagination in Mysticism and Esotericism: Marsilio Ficino, Ignatius de Loyola, and Alchemy", *Studies in Spirituality*, 6/1996 : 103-130. p. 108.

[580] Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Bk.I, Ch. VI, p. 91.

not be satisfied with the finite because it contained a ray of divine light. In this view of man, God transcends our faculties, though he is none the less a part of them -- "the Absolute is within us, and God became man in order that man might become God."[581] Being in this sense 'god-like', the human person participates in the divine actions of love, knowledge and creative activity, always doing in lesser form, what God may do in perfection. Repeatedly it is the fact not just that the human may so act, but that the human may so act freely that interests Ficino. He says of divine action that God is not led to action by necessity of nature but by a purpose of will and that "what is done by freedom of the will is more excellent than what is dragged into action" by necessity. "That action is happiest in which the author is in command of his own actions"[582]. The is as true of the human as it is of God for Ficino, for he writes of the human soul:

> "It is not compelled by the divine, from whose providence it is free from the start, nor is it coerced by anything natural over which it widely rules, nor is it dependent upon them, for indeed they are moved and judged by it;...since it is not acted upon by any natural object, therefore it is not determined by it, thus it moves along freely."[583]

"just as He forsees *that* you will do this, so He forsees *how* you will do it, that is willingly and freely."[584] Ficino reiterates that the free action is the highest action: "Hence a voluntary action is nobler than action by necessity of nature because it adds intelligence above nature, is master of its own act, places a measure to the act, prescribes

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[581] Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, p.67. See Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Bk. XIV, Ch. VIII, p.137: "Deus agitat mens humana quotidie, deo ardet cor, Deum suspirat pectus."

[582] Ficino, *Disputatio*, 12. translated in Trinkhaus, p.142-3.

[583] Ficino, *Disputatio*, 23. translated in Trinkhaus, p.143.

[584] Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Bk. I, p.126. translated in Trinkhaus, p.144.

the end, makes a different act in a different manner" The property of a voluntary action is to act contingently and freely. "therefore when there is a voluntary principle in man, there will also be a principle of liberty."[585] Choice is the evidence of both volition and freedom. "There must be the contingency of choosing between two alternatives, otherwise it would not be a mean between the necessary and the impossible, thought by Ptolemy and others to be the condition requiring conjecture rather than knowledge. For Ficino it is also the condition for *consilium*, meaning intention, or deliberate decision."[586] And decision is exactly the peculiar office of the human. Ficino says of deliberation and decision that "this is the property of man in so far as he is man." Charles Trinkhaus concludes, "All men, always and everywhere engage in deliberation and choice; those who are above men do not need deliberation; those who are below are unable to choose."[587]. Freedom, volition and choice in Ficino are, it would seem, inextricably linked. And so they are in Traherne. Like Ficino, Traherne affirms the importance of actions done voluntarily or freely and that such actions are peculiarly human.

That elements of Ficino should appear in Traherne is no surprise. Amongst his other works, Ficino was responsible for translating, Plotinus, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and Plato's dialogues from Greek into Latin. It is these very Platonic dialogues of Ficino's that occupy most of Traherne's *Ficino Notebook.* Not only does the existence of the *Ficino Notebook* give evidence of the importance of Ficino to Traherne (who wrote

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[585] This and the preceding quote are from Ficino, *Disputatio* 23-24. Translated in Trinkhaus p.144.

[586] Trinkhaus, p.144.

[587] This and the preceding quotation are from Trinkhaus p. 144.

almost the whole of the Notebook in his own hand, using an amanuensis only for two excerpts from Theophilus Gale's *Court of the Gentiles* [588]), and not only do Ficinan notions run as undercurrents in the Neo-Platonic tones which colour much of Traherne's work, but Ficino also appears explicitly in several of his texts. For example, Traherne's citation of Plato in *Century* III.60 comes directly from f. 48 of the *Ficino Notebook*[589], and in chapter XIII of *Christian Ethicks*, "Of Justice", he also cites Plato, this time the *Republic*, but again from the *Notebook*[590]. Marks has drawn some parallels between Ficino and *Christian Ethicks*, the *Centuries* and the *Commonplace Book*[591], and Dreher has noted Traherne's indebtedness to Ficino also in the *Centuries*[592]. Owen has also noted

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[588] On the significance of the use of Traherne's own hand versus the hand of an amanuensis in his notetaking and composition of works see Carol Marks, "Traherne's Church's Year-Book," *PBSA*, LX (1966) pp. 44-66.

[589] C.III.60 reads: "I no sooner discerned this but I was (as Plato saith, In summa Rationis Arce Quies habitat) seated in a Throne of Repose and Perfect Rest." And on folio 48 of the Notebook he remarks: "*Ex ipsius vitae Archivis dimanavit divina ista sententia, qua utebatur Plato – In summa rationis arce,Quies habitat.*". For further evidence of specific links between *C* and *FN* and for links with *CB* see Marks, "Traherne's *Ficino Notebook*" p.77-78.

[590] The passage from *CE* (p.95) which reads: "IT was a notable Observation of *Plato*, that by reason of our Dim Eyes we are not able to see immediately what Vertue does in Secret in the Soul. And therefore he sayes, that as an Old man that is blearey'd if he hath something given him to read in little Characters, finds it necessary first to see the same in Capital Letters; so to observe first what Vertue doth in a Commonwealth, is expedient to him, that would understand what it doth in his own Soul" is derived from the *Ficino Notebook* (f.37v) which reads: "idque eleganti ad modum [Plato] facit similitudine sc. proinde investigandam esse justitiam, ac si quis non acute cernentibus literas parvas (proculque positas) legendas mandasset; deinde animadvertisset aliquis essent alibi in majori quodam loco majores & eas inde primo legens, ita demum minores (quae eadem sunt) consideraret." I am indebted to Carol Marks for this observation.

[591] See note 33.

elements of Ficino in *Christian Ethicks*, but she asserts that what Traherne omits of Ficino is as important as what he includes. She analyses Traherne's notes on the *Charmides* and concludes that in these notes:

> "Ficino is drastically simplified, for Traherne jettisons abstruse comparison with Moses, Adam, Enoch and Elijah. More significant is the omission of a passage which spiritualises Socrates' praise of beauty, limiting its application to the mind, and including the body only in so far as it images intellectual beauty, for in this omission we may trace Traherne's own conviction of the intrinsic value of the physical body, and indeed of the whole material world. The only two aspects of Ficino's summary of the "Charmides" which Traherne records are themes which constantly recur in *Christian Ethicks*; in his abstract Traherne stresses the need for an active temperance as opposed to mere passive abstinence, and the essential unity of the virtues, temperance being inseparable from prudence and wisdom."[593]

As Marks also notes: "Traherne's note taking, in the Ficino Notebook as in the Commonplace-Book and in the Church's Year-Book, was private and practical: he omitted what was of no interest to him and he freely altered the passages he copied. Nor did he hesitate to insert editorial comments of his own,"[594] In places Ficino is re-worded and rearranged[595]. Ficino is an important source of Traherne's thought on the position of man, and Traherne uses Ficino with respect; but he does not follow him. Like Hermes and Pico, as well as his other sources, Ficino is the material not the master.

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[592] See Dreher "Traherne's Second *Century*: a Source in Ficino", *N&Q*, 224: (1979) p.434-436. Here she notes Ficino's *De Amore* as a source for Traherne's three-fold process of love – "love begetting, love begotten, and love proceeding" of *C*.II.40.

[593] Owen, "The Thought and Art of Thomas Traherne," University of London Master's Thesis (1957), pp. 29-30.

[594] Marks, "Traherne's *Ficino Notebook*" p. 80.

[595] This is particularly the case with regard to Traherne's notes on the *Republic*. See Marks' observations, op cit. p.80

Alongside Ficino stands Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, that other great fifteenth century Italian, thirty years younger than Ficino, and of the same school[596], famous for his proclamation of human freedom, and like Ficino, a source for Traherne's concept of man. Traherne's assertions, in the fourth *Century*, that man may shape himself into whatever nature he pleases, that he may have what he desires and be what he wishes is pure Pico. Traherne himself identifies *C*.IV. 76-77 and part of 74 as belonging to Pico, calling it alternately *De Dignitate Hominis* and "an oration"[597]. But Pico is present too elsewhere in Traherne's notion of seed and crop, in his all-pervasive belief that the human has power to change and become. This is the essence of what he takes from Pico, the notion of interior power, his insistence that "The deformity or excellency is within."[598]

It is to Pico that the birth of the modern concept of man as a self-actualising agent is often credited. Garin's 1963 address, which identified Pico's *De Dignitate Hominis* as a proclamation of radical human freedom stated that "The conscious image of man, which is characteristic of the modern world, was born here [in *De Dignitate*]: man exists in the act that constitutes him, he exists in the possibility of liberating himself."[599] And this is a view of Pico still commonly held by many scholars who take Pico's account of the

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[596] Ficino was born in 1433, Pico in 1463. They were the leading figures of the Platonic Academy of Florence which was a group of friends and disciples gathered around Marsilio Ficino and dedicated to his teachings.

[597] See *C*.IV.74: "for which caus Picus Mirandula admirably saith, in his Tract De Dignitate Hominis,..." and *C*.IV.78: "This Picus Mirandula spake in an Oration made before a most learned Assembly in a famous university."

[598] *C*.IV.78.

[599] an address by Garin cited in Craven, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: Symbol of His Age*, Librairie Droz, Geneve,1981. pp.26-27.

creation myth as his central statement on man.[600] Garin, in common with others, saw in Pico's work a view of man as scarcely distinct from God. "Human knowledge had the cosmic function of actuating reality, uniting it and leading it to perfection. Only through man could it attain its end, reunited and integrated in knowledge"[601]. Echoes of this may be traced in Traherne's notion, previously stated, that God can achieve more through man's liberty than by his own[602]. Though, unlike Garin, Traherne's reading of Pico sees the human as already free, existent not "in the possibility of liberating himself" but in an already given freedom. The view of Pico, which sees him as a spokesman for radical freedom has unavoidable implications for the distinction between God and man. If man is self-creating activity, actuating and unifying reality in his knowledge, then he is scarcely distinguishable from God[603]. Taken to its extreme, man creates himself by his own choices, he is father of himself, the only condition to which he is subject is that there is no condition – liberty. In this interpretation of Pico there is no need for grace; and Pico

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[600] Craven asserts that " Modern accounts of Pico's philosophy of man are based almost exclusively on this passage.' (Craven, p. 22). See, for instance, Andre Chastel, who called God's words to Adam "the most famous passage in all Renaissance anthropology." (*The Age of Humanism*, London, 1963, p228.)

[601] Craven on Garin (Craven, p. 25).

[602] See page 104 and note 554 above.

[603] In fact Pico makes the difference between God and the human quite clear: "The difference between God and man is that God contains all things in himself as their origin [*principium*] and man contains all things in himself as their center [*medium*]. Hence in God all things are of better stamp than in themselves, whereas in man inferior things are of noble mark and the superior are degenerate." In man, inferior things existed in a better form and superior things in a less worthy form. (Garin (1937), p.202. cited in Craven p.85).

has been seen by some as Pelagian, his faith in free will so strong as to absolutely preclude pre-destination and his belief in man as creator of his own destiny making him anthropocentric. Pico's man is himself a god.[604] These are similar to some of the criticisms also levelled at Traherne; and, as in Traherne's case, they too arise from incomplete readings of his texts. If the *Oratio* is taken to be the best and clearest statement of Pico's philosophy (and it has been so read by the majority of critics), one may indeed find the criticisms above have some justification. But, as William Craven's study has made clear, the *Oratio* may not be such a statement at all[605]. Even if it were, it would have to be balanced against Pico's man in *Heptaplus* whose statuesque stance is more passive and recipient than the man of *Oratio*.

There is a tension in Traherne between the human whose greatness is a greatness of being, the man in microcosm whose greatness simply *is* by virtue of his place in creation, and the human whose greatness is a greatness of potential – what he may become. In the microcosm model man is all; in the radical freedom model, he can become all. Craven sees the same tension in Pico's different portrayals of man in the *Oratio* and *Heptaplus*. His man of the *Oratio* is radically free, his man of the *Heptaplus* "surprisingly non-

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[604] See Craven, pp. 77-81 in which he outlines this view starting with the criticisms levelled by Semprini (in 1936) and Pusino (in 1925) and tracing that line of thinking into the 1950's and 60's. See Philip Hughes' comment that Pico's sentiments in the Oratio are "simply those of noble paganism" ("Pico della Mirandola", *Philosophia Reformata*, 23-24:1958-59,p.133).

[605] Craven contends that the Oratio was intended not as a bold statement of human dignity, but as a moral spur to his listeners. He writes: "Once the intention of the *Oratio* is appreciated, it can be seen how misleading it has been to depict Pico as the typical Renaissance enthusiast for human freedom and dignity. His lines about man's freedom to choose his own nature are not a metaphysical but a moral statement, and they function as part of an inflated, rhetorical argument for the educational effectiveness of philosophy and theology." (Craven, p. 45.).

operative, extraordinarily passive, almost statuesque"[606] "The contrast remains" writes Craven, "between a dynamic view of man who is potentially all and a static view of man who is actually all."[607] That Pico does not conclude for one or the other is another similarity with Traherne whose man also stands in the tension between potential and the actual, most fully human at the crossroads where choice is to be exercised, where power is to be converted into act.

Craven sees the bold statement to Adam of the Oration as a kind of rhetorical device. Traherne too sees the same passage in similar terms – as poetically exaggerated but deeply serious at the same time. He writes of *De Dignitate Hominis*: "Any man may perceiv, that He [Pico] permitteth his fancy to wander a little Wantonly after the maner of a Poet: but most deep and serious things are secretly hidden under his free and luxuriant Language."[608] To Craven, Pico's lines on man's freedom to choose his own nature in the *Oratio* is a moral rather than metaphysical statement. It is about what man ought to do as much as it is about what he is capable of (and it has more to do with Pico's desire to establish himself in the minds of his fellows as a serious philosopher than with a statement of radical freedom). It is in this light that Traherne cites the *Oratio* because for Traherne the central concern is always a moral one – ultimately we choose to live in the image of God or we do not. Freedom in Traherne is important not because it makes us like God (we are already made in God's image and so have freedom). The importance of

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[606] Charles Trinkaus, "In Our Image and Likeness", vol. II. p.519.

[607] Craven, p.31.

[608] *C*.IV.78.

our exercise of freedom is what we can make of ourselves as moral beings – to what extent we live in the image in which we were created.

Garin and many others have emphasised the empowering nature of Pico's writings, and whilst the picture of radical freedom they have portrayed may be only a part of Pico, what they have to say about power and act is relevant to this study of Traherne. Traherne's man, like Pico's, is both/and -- potentially and actually great. And his man's power to act is not radically free and fatherless, self- generated and perpetuated, but power to act an act transformed by grace into something resembling the divine. Ficino's concept of the centrality of man in the universe was transformed by Pico's doctrine of human freedom into the idea that all of the universe and all reality are concentrated in human knowledge. However because of the superiority of the will over abstract knowledge, it is in choice that man's greatness resides.[609] This is something Pico shares with Traherne who described the liberty of man's will as "the foundation of his Glory."[610] But where modern humanism has read Pico's man existing in the act that constitutes him, existing in the possibility of liberating himself, the choice of Traherne's man is towards conversion into Love[611].

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[609] See Craven, p.26.

[610] *SV* 45v.

[611] See C.IV. 80.

Power and Act:

In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne discusses the greatness of man by beginning with the Image of God as the highest thing God could create. He then considers this image in a body, that man is greater than the angels and concludes the entire work with an exposition of why man is greater in an Estate of Trial than he would be in any other state.[612] In this model the human is the pinnacle of creation, not just because he is a perfectly created creature, but because he is also active in the process of creation himself, in his mind perfecting and returning to God a world of his own imagining. He is the means and the end, the user, enjoyer, perfecter and co-creator. By his double nature, man is not only "Lord and Heir of the world"[613], head of all creatures, but also holds in common with the angels a life of the spirit. He is both/and, by his physicality making useful the things of the earth, and by his spirituality seeing into the end and causes of all things he has made useful:

> "For neither can immaterial Spirits enjoy the Glory of the Day, or use the Light, or need the Sun, or feed upon Air, or Eat, or Drink. Nor can Dust & Ashes see into the cause and End of Things, or Weigh the Lov & Goodness of the Donor, or Sing, or celebrat his Everlasting prayses. Therfore by a Miracle of Eternal Wisdom, the Way was found to Joyn, & unite these two together, that as the one did reap the Benefit, the other might return the Glory, Man having all Things in common with the Beasts, & Angels. "[614]

In this way he is both the means and the end of the world's perfection.

> "But how Excellent & Glorious this Man is, most appears, because he is the Means, & End of the Worlds perfection. And to Justify our Discourse, & Description of him, he is the Assistent forme as it were of the Glorious Univers. For as a Marriner is the Assistent form of his Boat &

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[612] This is outlined by the chapter titles of chapters 36, 40, 41 and 42.

[613] *SM*.I.82. He is also "head of all the Creatures" (*SM* III.95).

[614] *KOG* 348r-348v.

> a Master of his Ship, that stears, & governs, and makes it usefull: so is Man in the World the Assistent form or ἐντελήχια, that makes it usefull, & give[s] it its perfection.That Word accused of so much Barbarism, is fitly Adapted to the Soul, & to man: to the Soul in the Microcosm, to Man in the Macrocosm. For it is derived from ἐν τέλοσ, and ἔχω. All which signifies, To hav in the End its perfection. The use & perfection of the World depends upon Man as much as that of the Body does upon the Soul; or that of a Ship, on its Governor, & Master."[615]

That man 'makes useful' the world is more than a statement of utility. As we have already seen, what is useful is a treasure; and so in being made the ἐντελήχια, man is given power to make all things treasure. Man is needed as the perceiver of treasure without whom there could be no treasure. Does this make him, as Dobell and others have suggested, a Berkeleian before Berkeley was born[616]? Not at all. Despite the apparently Idealistic tenor of those much quoted lines from the third stanza of "My Spirit":

> "... I could not tell,
> Whether the Things did there
> Themselvs appear,
> Which in my spirit truly seemd to dwell;
> Or whether my conforming mind
> Were not alone even all that shind."[617]

Traherne does not doubt the reality of the 'objective world' independent of the perceiver's mind. In fact, as Sandbank notes, "The resemblance, discredited by Berkeley, between the outer world and our own perceptions and ideas, is, to Traherne, the central miracle of human knowledge."[618]. Traherne's 'things' are "remote, yet felt even

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[615] *KOG* 348v. cf. "Men being Angels by their Souls, have Bodies besides, that they may be united as the Angels are, and in another manner *make use of the World*," (*MSD* p74. italics mine).

[616] See Dobell's introduction, lxxxii- lxxxiv and Wade p.173-174. See also Stewart, p. 62; and Clements "Mode and Meaning" p.515.

[617] "My Spirit" ll. 46-51. I concur with Sandbank that these lines should be regarded as a hyperbolic expression of wonder rather than as an indication of an underlying philosphical Idealism. (see Sandbank, p.128).

[618] Sandbank, "Thomas Traherne on the Place of Man in the Universe", *SH*, 17(1966): 121-136. p. 128.

here.", "The utmost Star,/ Tho seen from far," is present to his eye. The perceiving soul and its object are united by the soul's act of perception that, rather than giving the object its reality, lifts the already real object to its true usefulness. By this being present with "the Being it doth note" the soul's "Essence [Capacitie] is transform'd into a tru/ and perfect Act." Aristotle's account of the process of thinking as a transition from power to act, from capacity to actuality is married to the Neo-Platonic notion of the spiritualisation of the material -- or as Traherne often describes making 'thoughts' of 'things'. This returning of the world to the creator will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.

That Traherne's human inhabits this place between power and act, between the potential and the actual is, as I have hinted earlier, his unique privilege. The human is the golden mean whose role and whose power is the exercise of liberty through choice. Traherne writes that "there are three Distinct Classes of being, Matter, Power and Act. Matter is the Worst, or vilest in it self, Act the best or most highly perfect. and Power as it were a mean between them both."[619] It is this position of Power, between pure matter and pure Act that Traherne sees as decisive. It is in this sense that the human position as the Golden Clasp comes into its fullness. Yes, the human is beautiful as the image of God, God's picture in a curious case beset with stars, a messenger between the creatures, and interval between time and eternity, the Hymanaeus marrying the creator and his creatures. All of these things, writes Traherne, are great, but they are not the principal reason for man's greatness. The excellency of man resides in his ability to weigh and reason, love

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[619] *KOG* 331v.

and admire[620], ultimately to desire and choose. As Traherne quotes from Pico, in the voice of God:

> "'O Adam, we hav given Thee neither a certain seat, nor a Private face, nor a Peculiar office, that whatsoever seat or face or office thou dost desire thou mayst Enjoy. All other things hav a Nature bounded within certain Laws; thou only art loos from all, and according to thy own Counsel in the hand of which I hav put Thee, mayst chuse and prescribe what Nature thou wilt thy self. I hav placed Thee in the Middle of the World, that from thence thou mayest behold on evry side more commodiously evry thing in the whole World. We hav made Thee neither heavenly nor Earthly Neither Mortal nor Immortal, that being the Honored Former and Framer of thy self, thou mayst shape thy self into what Nature thy self pleaseth.'"[621]

And these choices have eternal significance for the soul. They are not just about choosing what one may become here on earth, but what one will become in eternity since:

> "As by the Seed we conjecture what Plant will arise, and know by the Acorn what Tree will Grow forth, or by the Eagles Egge what Kind of Bird; so do we by the Powers of the Soul upon Earth, Know what kind of Being, Person and Glory it will be in the Heavens."[622]

Traherne is equally enthralled by what man is and by what man may become. Just as we may see in Pico the man whose greatness is actual (Pico's man of the *Oratio*) and the man whose greatness is potential (Pico's man of *Heptaplus*), so Traherne's high esteem of humanity is founded in both our potential and actual greatness. In fact, it is in the very interplay of these two models of man that the full weight of his greatness may be perceived:

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[620] see C.IV 75. "He desired som one, that might Weigh and reason, lov the Beauty, and admire the Vastness of so Great a Work [as creation]."

[621] C.IV.76 Here Traherne is quoting from Pico's *Oratio* which Traherne refers to by the commonly known title *De Dignitate Hominis* (C.IV.75). As Craven points out (p.34) Pico's concern is with the use the human may make of freedom rather than a proclamation of that freedom as absolute.

[622] *C*.IV.70. Here Traherne is very like Pico whom he quotes in *C*.IV.77.

> "What Mercurius said in the Dialogue is most true, Man is of all other the Greatest Miracle. Yea verily. Should all the Miracles that ever were don be drawn together, Man is a Miracle greater then they. And as much may be written of Him alone as of the whole World"[623]

writes Traherne, affirming what man is, and yet what we may be made is also great:

> "O Lord what Creatures! what Creatures shall we becom! What Divine, what Illustrious Beings! Souls worthy of so Great a Lov, Blessed for ever. Made Worthy, tho not found. for Lov either findeth or maketh an Object Worthy of it self."[624]

We spring from greatness into greatness, made in the divine image, we yearn for divinity. What is more, we are given the power to choose, to see, to act. "But Surely if God hath don all he can Man must be an Astonishing and Stupendous creature. What can he do? he can See Eternity, and Possess infinity."[625] Furthermore, the human may become God's "voluntary work-man"[626] imitating God in blessing and giving:

> "The Divine Image consisteth more in Doing then Enjoying, in Shining then Receiving; in being then in haveing all Treasure. By this we are, what by the other we are Intended...we receive all Treasures for this End, that we may be a Treasure."[627]

And yet, Traherne also says of man's nature that it is "Nauseating and weary" and that man is "confined" [628]. "There is in man a Double selfe, according as He is in God, or the

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[623] *C*.IV.81. See also "O what Incredible Things hast thou don for Men! Made every Soul almost a God, Like God unto Thee... every Soul is an Infinit Centre" (*SM* I.83). "The Dividing of the Sea, the commanding of the Sun, the making of the World is nothing to the Single Creation of one Soul:" (*C*.IV.81).

[624] *C*.IV.74.

[625] SM.III.90.

[626] *SM* III. 45.

[627] *SM* III.46.

[628] *SM* III.65-66.

world. In the world He is confined, ... but in God he is evry where."[629] There is a nothingness to Traherne's soul which is, paradoxically, also part of its greatness. He insists:

> "From all Eternity to my First Conception I was Nothing, from my first Conception to all Eternity I am a Being. From all Eternity my Being was with God Almighty. to all Eternity my Nothing will be before my Face. From all eternity to all Eternity my nothing and my Being Endless and unmovable: and I in both infinitly Greater,...God seen all Activity Life and Power, in raising me from nothing to infinit Glory...Gods fulness in Mans Emptiness Best Appearing."[630]

This 'nothing' or 'emptiness' is the other side of Traherne's great theme of 'Capacitie' and it is one of the features that makes the soul less than divine – Traherne's human soul lacks spontaneity. Its rich inner life depends completely upon outside forms lent by the Creator. It is capable of infinity, but it is nothing until recipient[631]. This is an essentially Aristotelian notion: "The mind, says Aristotle, "is in a manner potentially all objects of thought, but is actually none of them until it thinks."[632] To Traherne, these potentialities or capacities are "Pure Empty Powers,"[633]. The mind is "Changeable, Capacious, Easy, free,"[634]. The soul is "naturaly very Dark, and Deformed and Empty" until filled by the

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[629] *SM*.II. 92. Here Traherne refers specifically to man's capacity for infinity and eternity -- how his thoughts can touch eternity.

[630] *SM* III.78.

[631] See for instance, 'Thoughts III' in which thoughts, those things without which the soul is "useless" (l.16) turn "From nothing to Infinitie" "Even in a Moment" (ll.37-38). See also "O Lord, of myself I am nothing, and therfore all that I am more I receive from thee:" (*MSD* p75).

[632] *De anima*, 429b 30-31. Trans. R.D.Hicks (1907), p. 135. Cited in Sandbank, p. 123.

[633] 'The Preparative' l. 51.

[634] "Thoughts III" l.35.

world with "Amiable Ideas", for "GOD and All Things must be contained in our Souls, that we may becom Glorious Personages,"[635].

In this portrayal of the soul, the soul is similar to the child of Traherne's early innocence, and it is a measure of the coherence of Traherne's thought that his consideration of one theme should lead so easily to the other. As he writes at the very beginning of the *Centuries*: "An Empty Book is like an Infants Soul, in which any Thing may be Written. It is Capable of all Things, but containeth Nothing."[636]. This early stage is not just a stage of capacity but of receptivity as well. The pre-knowledge emptiness of Traherne's child is the best condition for ideal knowledge, which is why Traherne writes that he "must becom a Child again."[637], must "retire" and "get free"[638]

> "Our Saviors Meaning, when He said, He must be Born again and becom as a little Child that will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: is Deeper far then is generaly believed. It is not only in a Careless Reliance upon Divine Providence, that we are to becom Little Children, or in the feebleness and shortness of our Anger and Simplicity of our Passions: but in the Peace and Purity of all our Soul. ... all our Thoughts must be Infant-like and Clear : the Powers of our Soul free from the Leven of this World, and disentangled from mens conceits and customs."[639]

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[635] *C*.II.84.

[636] C. I.1. In this case Traherne promises to take on the role of creator, filling the empty book with "profitable wonders' for his reader as God filled the world and infinity with objects for the soul's capacity.

[637] "Innocence" l.60. See also C.III.3: "I unlearn, and becom as it were a little Child again, that I may enter into the Kingdom of GOD."

[638] "The Preparative" ll. 69-70. Notice also his invitation in *Inducements to Retiredness* to retire from the world for the betterment of the soul.

[639] *C*. III. 5.

With this infant clarity, we would "naturaly" see "those Things, to the Enjoyment of which" we are "Naturaly Born"[640] as does the child of the third *Century* for whom "The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown", for whom "Boys and Girles Tumbling in the Street, and Playing, were moving Jewels" [641]. The child's mind is "disengaged"[642] and perfectly receptive and nearer to happiness. But disentanglement requires change. 'Unlearning' is one expression of the beginning of such a change, "now I unlearn, and become as it were a little child again, that I may enter into the Kingdom of God"[643] Traherne writes. Yet 'unlearning' as simply a kind of re-education is insufficient. A new birth is requisite. "My early tutor is the womb" writes Traherne; he flies "to the womb that he "may yet new-born become."[644] Again the image is of a return to nothingness, to a starting point of emptiness and void.

> "God Hath don more for us then we could find out How to Imagine. All the world is in his Infinity, and His Infinity within us. yet hath He made the Soul Empty, as if there were noe Such Infinity within us, no such world, no God, no Being. nay not a Soul till we meditate upon it,"[645]

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[640] Ibid.

[641] *C.* III. 3.

[642] "the Preparative" l.63.

[643] Ibid.

[644] "The Return" ls. 3, 11-12.

[645] *SM* IV.13.

The 'Infant-Ey' may be a perfect instrument of reception; it cannot, however, act upon the world and restore it back to God. That can only be achieved by the mind renewed. The pure and empty receptivity of the soul, typified in the child's mind, is the venue for cognition; it is the active mind of the adult, however, that can perform that particular task which Traherne assigns to humanity – the re-creation and exaltation of the physical world[646].

That man's role as exalter of creation involves transition is exactly appropriate since he himself is in transition between power and act. Unlike God, who is "Power from all Eternity transformed into Act", the soul is pure power. It is actually nothing – derived, dependent and subject to accident, it is great only by virtue of its potential.

> "Admitting the Soul to be meer and naked Power, being Divested of all Substance beside, it is next to Nothing, and yet it is the most Glorious Being in the whole World. It differs from God inevitably in these following things, It had a Beginning, it received its Being from another, it was made out of Nothing, it dependeth on another, it is Mutable, it may be turnd into Nothing, it is compounded of Power and Act, wheras God is all Act, it is obliged, and owes all it has to its Author, it is compounded of Essence and Existence, and is a substance subject to Accidents."[647]

The soul is partial. It is in transition. One part of it moving towards act whilst the rest remains unexerted. It may seem to be "in a long swoon, or a Dead Sleep," or

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[646] The divine light, that was ours by birth and lost by the advent of custom into our lives, remaining latent in us, can, according to Traherne, fed by experience and the application of reason, re-emerge as our guiding principle -- our way of seeing, which is at the same time, our way of life. And this new form of sight is even better than the first. "I remember the Time," writes Traherne, "when the Dust of the Streets were as precious as Gold to my Infant Eys, and now they are more precious to the Ey of Reason."(*C*.I.25). Whereas the first light was purely intuitive, the second light is illuminated by reason and valued more highly because it is so hard won. It is a reinstated vision achieved by recognition of the divine light in oneself and in the created world; and by the application of highest reason to one's experience of that light so that in humility, repentance and gratitude, one receives all that God is giving.

[647] *KOG* 330r.

> "It may be compounded of Power and Act, as it is when the Soul having power to think and desire Innumerable Things, thinks of one, or desires this or that in Particular without thinking or desiring the residue: for then its Power is in Part exerted, and so it is partly Act, and partly Power."[648]

The desiring soul, the soul exerted, the soul extended, this is the soul in progress towards the divine. This is the soul moving from nothingness to substance, from potential to actual. The soul in motion is the soul at its most quintessentially human, at its most alive. "Life is an Abilitie to Apprehend, and Move"[649] says Traherne in a statement so definitive that he finds it necessary to underscore it in his manuscript. This is where the right apprehension discussed in chapter three meets the power to choose of chapter four. We apprehend, value, desire and move in one fluid movement. This is, for Traherne, the essence of what it is to be alive: "for whatosever liveth is able to conceiv, and move in like manner: at least inwardly, by its very conception of Desire....Life therfore in my Apprehension is so simple a Being, that its material cause, and Form are one: Power to perceiv is its Material Cause, and the Form that gives it its denomination, its power to perceive. Its essence and Quidditie is Power to perceiv." This is why power and act are held in tension in Traherne rather than made distinct – because the material and formal causes are one. The power to perceive implies the power to desire and to act. He goes so far as to claim that "all that is in it [the soul] is power and Desire," and then he clarifies in a statement that exalts human desire from the level of a gut reaction to an act of will: "or

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[648] This and the immediately preceding quotation are from *KOG* 330v.

[649] *KOG* 276v.

rather simple power, power to perceiv, or power to desire. Desire is an Act without which Life may be. But Power to desire is in it of Necessitie."[650]

It is desire that is the engine of the extending soul. By desire the soul extends itself to all its objects; by exercising the power to desire the soul chooses and its power is poured out into act. When it sees as God sees and loves as he loves, desires all that he desires and extends itself to all objects, reaching at once to all things, "then is its power is poured out, and Transformed; and the Act wherin it appeareth will be so like God, that the Sun in a mirror will not more resemble the Sun in the Heavens, ... For God will be the Soul of the Soul it self."[651].

So we may see how much the greatness of the human soul is linked with its ability to desire. In its essence the soul is nothing. In it capacity it is infinite. And the engine by which it extends from potential towards actual is its desire. In as much as it reflects the divine image, the soul is glorious. With Hermes, Pico and Ficino, Traherne proclaims that the human is the pinnacle of creation and the golden clasp; we are God's body in a curious case, the greatest miracle, and the wonder of the world. And what we may become, and the very fact that we may choose to become at all, is the expression of that greatness; it is that greatness in action, the actualisation of what is potential. It is the human filling his position as link between two worlds. What one may become is a question of how one lives:

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[650] This and all the quotation in this paragraph are from *KOG* 276v. Cf. *KOG* 334v in which the power to enjoy is extolled. The power to enjoy is "desirable" and "blessed" but always secondary to the power to desire.

[651] *KOG* 330v.

> "If I live truely in the Divine Image I shall appear among kings a Greater king....He made Thee for Himselfe in makeing Thee Like Himselfe. Despaire not, Forgett not, Be not careless, but Liv alwayes at this Height. He made Thee for Himselfe, by makeing Thee Like God. when He made Thee His Image He Intended that thou shouldst Live Like a God,"[652]

It is in this most profound sense that what we are and what we may become is intimately linked to the issue of choice.

Free Agency:

According to Traherne, all virtue is an acquired habit, not a natural gift. Whereas the soul is "the immutable essence, unimployed," the mind is the soul in motion. "A Man is then said to be of such a *Mind*, when he determines, or thinks in such a manner. His mind is Good that intendeth well, his mind is Evil that designeth mischief. So that the Mind is the soul exerting its power in such an act:"[653] It is the will intending, the soul exerting itself in power, in other words it is choice that converts natural gift into virtue, according to Traherne. Love, for instance, that primary virtue, is bound by choice. "Now Love is a free Affection" writes Traherne, "which cannot be compelled, nor be without freedom." And no other actions can be good unless they spring from love, performed willingly and with desire:

> "Unless they Spring from Love which is free, unless they are Willingly performed and with Desire God doth them instead of the Soul; if the soul be forced to do them whether it will or no; they are not fruits of Righteousness; but servile and Inanimate, their Beauty is Destroyed."[654]

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[652] *SM*.IV.15.

[653] This and the preceding quotation are from *CE* p. 231-232.

[654] This and the preceding quotation are from *SV* 26r.

In his chapter in *Christian Ethicks* on the virtue of magnanimity, Traherne contrasts the greatness of those who are born to greatness with the greatness of those who choose it against all odds. Of these he writes;

> "others consider what they have to do, and make an election, and though they are born in a poor and despicable estate, are not Magnanimous by nature, or Fortune, but by *Choice* and voluntary Election. …and this is the Off-spring of the *Will*, the true and genuine *Vertue*."[655]

Election and free will are held in balance in *A Sober View*. Traherne will deny neither: "For he that denieth that Article of Election loppeth away one great Branch from the doctrine of the Church of England: as he that denieth the Gift of Liberty doth violat a real part of Experience and Reason."[656] And yet the tension in which election and free will are held is an uncomfortable one. The very fact that he discusses the doctrine of election in such detail suggests that it is an important and perhaps difficult doctrine to him; and the issue to which he consistently returns is the issue of free will. Over and over again he asserts the importance of actions done of one's own accord[657]. Traherne cites the creed, the "Doctrine of the Holy Apostle [Paul] Romans 5:18" and "divers passages in the Liturgie" such as the priest's words upon administration and the comfortable words of the Prayer Book[658] as evidence that God offers grace and mercy to all. This, Traherne insists,

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[655] CE p.232

[656] *SV* 44r. Here Traherne is contrasting Sanderson's more moderate view with Hammond's more stridently Armenian one and implying that Hammond is wrong to deny the doctrine of election.

[657] "he requireth them all to repent and believ and make themselves a clean Heart, and this he desireth infinitly that they would do, but do it freely of their own Accord."[657] (*SV*25r.) Here he is referring to the prophet Ezekiel's admonition to Israel. (Ez 18,30,31).

[658] See *SV* 41v- 42v.

"manifestly implieth, that God dealeth with Man as a *free Agent* capable of being taught mistracted and persuaded, and is ready to absolve him of all Sins, but desireth that he should repent *of his own Accord*."[659]

> "That they may be voluntarily Righteous is that End why he infuseth not faith into the Reprobate irresistibly, not that they may be Damned."[660]

Traherne agrees with Twisse's restricting election to the giving or forbearing to give grace since for him, damnation or salvation as an everlasting condition of humankind dehumanises the person. "In restraining the Decrees of Election and Reprobation purely to the Act of giving or forbearing to give Grace he [Twisse] hath Done very Accurately , and Wisely,"[661]

And yet he never seems to resolve the difficult question -- just how free are we? If God's dealing with the elect is 'irresistible' are they not thereby compelled rather than voluntary? Traherne describes the conversion of the elect in terms that sound almost like a kind of spiritual rape. The "immortal Seed" is "implanted in them" and "tho in the Instant of recieving it they are meerly passive, are wrought upon by violence:". They are "Invaded" that they may be "after it voluntary and Righteous Agents.... For", concludes

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[659] *SV* 42v. (italics mine).

[660] *SV*. 23v. Here Traherne is juxtaposing Twisse's view that God's decrees of Election and Reprobation concern 'grace efficacious' with Hoord's view that God's decrees concern 'the everlasting condition of man' (*SV* 22r) Both men discuss God's refusing to give grace irresistibly to the reprobate, but Twisse's understanding of this refusal means that for him it is an act of grace rather than judgement since it makes the continuing of God's righteous kingdom possible. "For by forbearing to give irresistible Grace unto them he prepareth a place for his Righteous Kingdom; and by forbearing to give it irresistibly but being willing to impart it, if it be sought maketh them capable of being Righteous." (*SV* 23v).

[661] *SV* 24r.

Traherne, "it is easy to observe, that above all things in the World God Desires that men should turn of themselves and that having all Means and Motives therunto, Should repent and believ of their own Accord." [662] It is at this point that his 'critical reader' finds it necessary to comment in the marginalia: "this seems contradictory to the last lines & to me is so in itself for graunting all have prevening Grace it is Impossible but it [the soul] must cooperate in the conversion, not [be] wholly passive."[663] Traherne manoeuvres around the question of passivity, suggesting that in the moment of conversion the elect soul is both passive and active at once just as it is Rebellious and Righteous at once -- rebellious in its passivity and Righteous in its action of conforming to and complying with the work of God.[664] He continues " For there is no Instant of time wherin a Living Soul Is meerly Passive." [665] and "But at the Instant of its Conversion it is Active. For it is never converted till it doth voluntarily turn from Sin to Righteousness;"[666]. He then

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[662] *SV*35r. On the next page he restates; "For that they may herafter do Good Works of their own Accord are the one now Invaded: and that in this Act the other might be righteous of their own Accord are the other emitted." (SV 35v). A few folios later he again speaks of this 'invasion' as distasteful to God: "For to convert ...in a way so uncouth and unacceptable to God, as that is of invading many Wills is altogether as much if not more than the redeeming of Sinners while there was a Hope they would be righteous." (*SV* 39v).

[663] *SV* 35r.

[664] "The Act of Conversion therfore being Instantaneous, it seemeth they were Righteous and Rebellious together. They are rebellious in being meerly passive, they are Righteous in Being Active: that is in Conforming to, and complying with the Work of God in a voluntary maner." (*SV* 35r).

[665] *SV* 35r. He continues: "Or if it be in that Instant it is truly Rebelling. For it is its Duty to be vigorous and Active, and therfore in being Passive is truly Rebellious; were it possible it could be purely and meerly Passive."

[666] *SV*.35r.

struggles to maintain the simultaneity of this passive/active position by claiming that the soul is these things simultaneously in time which it cannot be simultaneously in nature, and that the soul is passive as it is inspired and active as it consenteth. Nevertheless, 'Just how free are we really?' is a question with which Traherne is not comfortable and which he never really resolves satisfactorily in this work, though all his efforts do lead him inexorably back to his basic premise that all righteousness is founded upon freedom of choice. Under this umbrella both the elect and the reprobate huddle, each given a different kind of chance to do good works "of their own accord". "For that they may herafter do Good Works of their own Accord are the one now Invaded: and that in this Act the other might be righteous of their own Accord are the other emitted."[667]

In *A Sober View*, Traherne seems more interested in the reprobate than in the elect whose destiny is already sealed. It is the reprobate whose greater freedom of choice offers the greater glimpse of glory, whose eventual repentance and return to the fold causes more joy in Heaven than the just 99 who rest secure[668]. And we are reminded, it is the reprobate who has been forgiven most who loves the most[669]. It is characteristic of Traherne that his imagination fixes on the only two redeeming features of evil – that it affords the possibility of forgiveness and restoration and that it is evidence of human

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[667] *SV* 35v.

[668] "Nay they trample on his Bowels, tread under foot the Blood of their Redeemer. And yet they exceed Angels for there is more Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth than over 99 just men that need no repentance:" (*SV* 39v).

[669] *SV* 39v.

freedom[670]. He writes that "mans Power to sin proceeded from the Excessive Greatness of Gods Love, the Liberty of his Will being the foundation of his Glory:"[671] with real conviction. For him reprobation is never forever because choice is such a fundamental part of being human. Where there is liberty of will there may be repentance. Better still, there may be obedience. And so the purity or impurity of the soul is determined by its own choices; choices which constantly exercise our liberty and God's grace:

> "A pure and Holy soul is the vessel which God expecteth to com out of the fire Bright and pure: Pure and Holy it cannot be unless it be Willingly When therfore it useth its Liberty to Obedience it is Holy; but when to Rebellion it is impure"[672]

Liberty and Grace:

Liberty exercised to obedience or to rebellion – either is a backdrop for grace. It is by grace that we may be obedient; it is by grace that our rebellion may be recovered. And it is to the consideration of Grace that I would now turn. As I noted briefly in chapter one (note 85), properly understood there are four Estates in Traherne. The Estate of Innocence, the Estate of Misery, the Estate of Grace and the Estate of Glory. The third estate, Grace, far from being an easy option, is also the Estate of Trial since it is in trial that grace is experienced. Traherne makes this clear at the beginning of chapter XXIV of *Christian Ethicks* when he writes:

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[670] See for instance, *KOG* 176r-176v in which the Fall, though a crime as 'The Blood of Dragons, and the Venom of Aspes" unto God, is disaster turned into "Delights and Victories"— a wonder greater than the original creation of the world.

[671] *SV* 45v.

[672] *SV* 26v.

> "PATIENCE is a Vertue of the Third estate; it belongs not to the estate of Innocence, because in it there was no Affliction; nor to the estate of Misery, because in it there is no Vertue: but to the estate of Grace it appertains, because it is an estate of Reconciliation, and an estate of Trial: wherein Affliction and Vertue meet together. In the estate of Glory there is no Patience."[673]

In the first and fourth Estates grace is not necessary. In the second Estate grace is not found. But in the third Estate grace is essential. The Estate of Grace is an estate of progress, of reconciliation and of trial. It is a mixed Estate, the estate in which we live the vast majority of our earthly lives -- the place where virtue may grow out of afflicition. It is not where we were, nor what we hope for, but where we are.

Much has been written about Traherne and innocence and about Traherne and glory, and yet it is to this neglected third Estate that almost all of his work in some way refers. Since what has been said of patience above is true of the other virtues as well, all of his work on virtue resides here. Anything which purports to be of practical service must pertain to this Estate, since it is particularly in this Estate that the working out of our lives occurs. His memory of innocence, however bright, is essentially a memory lost, the regaining of which occurs here. His apprehension of final glory refers back to and includes the virtues won in the Estate of Grace.

So close is Traherne's understanding of grace and trial that he uses the two terms interchangeably. The Estate of Grace is the Estate of Trial; to be in one is to also be in the other. In fact, it is at the lowest point of Trial, when the soul "incurable and Incourageable" refusing mercy and defying love, that "Free Grace is exalted to the utmost Zenith"[674]. However, since grace is present not only in the Estate of Trial, but also in the

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[673] *CE* p.185.

[674] *SV* 39v.

divine acts of creation and consummation[675], it may be clearer to refer to this particular third, in-between state simply as the Estate of Trial.

Without an Estate of Trial there could be no righteous kingdom:

> "The reason of an estate of Trial, in relation to Gods kingdom, is its Perfection; nay verily its existence....Now without an estate of Trial, there could be no Righteous Kingdom no Libertie of Action, no Ingenuitie, and fidelitie or Lov in a weak estate, no occasion of Reward at all."[676]

Similarly, In *Christian Ethicks* Traherne asserts "that the state of Trial, and the state of Glory are so mysterious in their Relation, that neither without the other could be absolutely perfect."[677]

One of the important features of the Estate of Trial is that it is a process and that it is a process requiring liberty. Were we to bypass the process and advance immediately to Glory we would miss the debate, the choice; something of our liberty would be lost. We would, in fact, be imposed upon:

> "In respect of the soul... Had God created his Image in immediat Glory the Beauty of Goodness being clearly seen, would immediatly have attracted its desires, and hav ravished its affections for evermore: so that there had been no consultation, no Debate, no Trial, but a Swift, and Rapid Union of souls unchangeably abiding for ever. Liberty had been excluded, and Necessity only, tho a Gratefull Necessity imposed upon it."[678]

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[675] "And as free Grace was the fountain of the Creation, and of the Redemption, so we see it the fountain of the Sanctification of the world; and richer and more Sublime at last then at the first." (*SV* 40r). On the need for grace see 42v. "My Good Child Know this, that thou art not able to do those things of thyself, nor to walk in the Commandments of God and to serv him without his Special Grace, which thou must learn at all times to call for by Diligent Prayer."

[676] *KOG* 362v.

[677] *CE* p.184.

[678] *KOG* 362v-363r.

The problem with the above scenario, as Traherne sees it, is not the end result, which is union, but what is destroyed in the process. He concludes, "Now for the soul to Act by necessity destroys its Glory."[679] Traherne continues with an image of the soul at a pinnacle of liberty – the vertical point, the very zenith of our utmost height – that is having the power to choose. On either side -- powerlessness or being compelled to use our power -- is a direct descent. The utmost height is in "the Top of Libertie...To decline from which on either hand, is to debase us."[680]

This question of status matters to God, according to Traherne, because the dignity of the human is the dignity of his bride. God desires a bride who is in some sense his equal,

> "It is the Glory of God, that he is a free, and eternal Agent. Had any thing been before him to compell him, had he acted by an Inward Principle of Necessitie, without Desire, and Delight,he had been Passiv, and dishonorable."[681]

This is what God wants for his bride also, that she should be free to act with Desire and Delight. "Willingness in its operation is the Beauty of the Soul, and its Honour founded in the freedom of its Desire."[682] And so:

> "He adventured to make high Creatures like himself, that might Act freely. That they might be Divine and Holy too, the springs and fountains of excellent Actions, Admirers Honorers, Adorers, and Praisers, Lords, and Lovers, friends, and Sons, most high and Admirable persons abov the reach of Fate after the Similitude of the Deitie,"[683]

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[679] *KOG* 363r.

[680] *KOG* 363r. similarly in *KOG* 174v "To constrain them, was to dishonor them"

[681] *KOG* 363r.

[682] *CE* p. 149.

[683] KOG 174v. "for god desired that Good Works should spring from Ingenuitie not necessity; from Good Will and Pleasure, not from Fate; from Love and Obedience, not from Bondage, from inward Desire, and not from outward force." He reiterates (*KOG* 175v). See

Several times Traherne uses the word "adventured" of God[684]. He "adventured" to do or to make, as if to suggest risk in God's loving. Traherne seems intrigued by this, and notes the paradox of Divine goodness making possible the advent of evil. "Thus his infinit Goodness, by the utmost excess of its perfection, made evil possible,...For it put the Gate of Fate into the Hand of its Creature"[685] . It is as if the risk attached to God's action in making his creatures free is part of his joy as a lover[686]. Where "all is easy, safe, and secure, all imposed by Fatal efficacie, all inevitable, we are meerly Passiv,"[687] claims Traherne, but

> "GOD intended more then this [being constrained to love] for his Bride; she must hav features and Graces more Delightfull, ornaments more Amiable, and Beautifull; so Divine, that the very Memory of them should be sweeter, then all that in a solitary state of stiffe, and passive Glory can be devised."[688]

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also "Man is made to appear in Glory, as well as to inherit all Treasure. And therfore is Endued with Liberty of will as well as comprehension....But God would have Him Glorious in Himselfe in respect of His own Actions works and operation. He would have Him voluntary as God is," (*SM* II. 32.)

[684] In the previous quotation he adventured to make us high creatures. In *CE* p.92 "God adventured the possibility of sinning into our hands...". Later in *KOG* 174v he also "adventured the Possibilitie of a Sin into his Creatures Hands". This part of *KOG* 174 v almost exactly parallels that cited above from *CE*. See also "Thanksgivings for the Soul" (ll.460-462) : "That for our perfect Glory,/ Thou didst adventure into our hands/ A Power of displeasing thee."

[685] *KOG* 174v-175r. Traherne notes that God made provision that we should use our liberty well and then "cheerfully commited the World to his Creatures Godliness, hoping and expecting a Return of glorious Delights" (*KOG* 175r-175v).He then immediately returns to the element of risk: "Souls indeed are not like trees, that must flourish of Necessity." They can bear or forbear and frustrate the labor of the husbandman.

[686] See also note 123 of this thesis where the word 'danger' with regard to God's risk in loving is considered

[687] *KOG* 363v.

[688] *KOG* 363v

The implication is that God wanted a bride who is not merely recipient, stiff and passive in her glory, but one who, graced by her power to choose, participates in a dynamic of gift and receipt.

"Nothing but freedom and desire"[689] carried God to his Act and so he wishes it to be for his bride. He wishes this not just because his joy as a lover is increased by the free response of his bride, but because the freedom of her action signals the height of her estate. In *The Cermonial Law* Traherne claims that God's wooing of us as a "Heavenly Queen" is "a Signe, we Equal objects are/ Even with the Angels" of his love and care[690]. In both *Love* and *The Kingdom of God*, the Bride is described as being royal. She is Queen, Empress, Potentate; and as Traherne reminds us, it does not befit "the estate of a Queen to be compeld."[691].

Although the freedom of the bride is given to the soul by right, the virtues and graces that adorn the soul as queen and bride are won in the Estate of Trial. Traherne describes the Estate of Trial as having five benefits: 1) multiplication of our wants, (that our treasures may be multiplied) 2) whetting of the appetite, enflaming of desire 3) the establishment of rewards and dispensations by which government and empire are framed 4) the glory of actions by which virtue is won and felicity is gained 5) the possibility of danger which

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[689] *KOG* 363r.

[690] The full quotation reads: "That He should Woo, and treat His Heavenly Queen/ On Earth, that she His GLORY here might see,/ And be Espoused to the DIETY:/ It is a Signe, we Equal objects are/ Even with the Angels of His Lov and Care:" *TCL*, introduction, ll. 32-36.

[691] *KOG* 365r. See also chapter one note 11 of this thesis.

affords delight to the spectator and a crown of triumph to the actor. This estate benefits either God or the human or God's Kingdom, or, as Traherne goes on to confess, all of them together, God, Angels and Men. "For they all are in a twofold Capacitie, either as Actors or spectators: and in either Relation have a double Happiness."[692]

In *A Sober View* Traherne speaks of the Estate of Trial as being an expression of divine Wisdom. The first scene of divine wisdom was Innocence in which God's glory and man's happiness were united. The second scene is the Estate of Trial. This is a scene in which "Wisdom Discerned a Means without destroying the Subjects to renew the Kingdom"[693]. In this estate evil is turned into good: "Sin itself enflamed unto Love, and Hatred unto Zeal and Guilt unto Holiness, Misery produced Happiness, and Shame wrought forth and augmented Glory, Despair added Wings to Endeavor...all were cemented by the Blood of Christ and made greater Treasures to God and each other:"[694]

So we may see that not only does the Estate of Trial beautify the bride and make plain her status as a free agent; but it also allows the restoration of righteousness. This is so most importantly because it is in the Estate of Trial that the soul makes its choices:

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[692] *KOG* 361v.

[693] *SV* 38v.

[694] *SV* 39r. Traherne goes on to describe Election as a third scene in which the Holy Spirit acts upon the reprobate in an overwhelming act of grace (*SV* 39r-40v). His 'critical reader' admonishes him not to make a distinction between the work of Christ which makes possible the Estate of Trial (Traherne's 'second scene') and the work of the Holy Spirit by which the reprobate is elected (Traherne's 'third scene').

> "Righteousness is a Wise and voluntary motion and operation of the Soul, wherby the person that is converted becometh Righteous becaus he cooperates with God, and maketh use of the Ability which God giveth him of his own Accord:"[695]

All virtue, moral goodness or righteousness is tied to this principle of freedom. Traherne asserts:

> "To be Good, to be Holy, to be Righteous is freely to delight in Excellent Actions, which unless we do of our own Accord no External Power whatsoever can make us, Good, or Holy, or Righteous:"[696]

and again:

> "Nothing is Moraly Good but what is Righteous. That is, which floweth from one that is sensible of what is right, purely from his Love to virtue, in respect to Obligations and Rewards; freely, without compulsion or Constraint;" and having the desire to do something beautiful.[697]

Moral goodness difffers from natural goodness chiefly in this, that it has a life of its own by virtue of the liberty and ingenuity that underlies it. It is more than natural goodness, hard won and ardently desired:

> "MORAL Goodness includeth all the Perfections of the former [ie Natural Goodness], and something more. For *Life* and *Liberty* enter its Existence; and it is *Wisely* Exercised in *Love* and *Vertue*. A clear Understanding and a free will are the principles of those Actions that are Morally Good: they must flow from *Ingenuity* and *Desire*;"[698]

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[695] SV 34v.

[696] CE.p.93.

[697] SV 27v. His preceding lines detail the process: "That a Work may be Good, it must be suitable to the End for which it is ordained. It must proced from a right principle, in a Right manner, be according to Rule, Directed to a Good End, and freely performed."

[698] *CE*.p.78. similarly, in *SV* (27r) Traherne states; "That a Work may be Good, it must be suitable to the End for which it is ordained. It must proceed from a right principle,in a right manner, be according to Rule, directed to a Goo d end, and freely performed." And again, "Nothing is Moraly Good but what is Righteous. That is, which floweth ...freely, without compulsion or Constraint; having a desire of doing [what is] Beautifull," (27v).

Moral Goodness is never accidental. And although it benefits all, its real value lies in the soul of the one whose will and understanding has become good. The greatest benefit of moral goodness is in the will of the one who exercises it. In his chapter on Goodness in *Christian Ethicks* Traherne writes:

> "A mad man, or a fool, may by accident save a mans Life, or preserve an Empire, yet be far from that Goodness which is seated in the Will and Understanding....And the Truth is that the *External Benefit*, tho it saves the Lives, and Souls, and Estates, and Liberties, and Riches, and Pleasures, and Honors, of all mankind, acts but *Physically* by a Dead or passive Application, the root of its influence and value is seated in another place, in the Soul of him whose Goodness was so Great as to sacrifice his Honor, and Feclicity for the Preservation and Welfare of those whom he *intended* to save. It is seated in the *Counsel* and *Design* of the Actor."[699]

In *A Sober View* it is the same. Wherever Traherne discusses moral goodness, freedom is not far behind. In fact freedom and goodness are inseparable: "Their freedom is their Goodness, for unless they [fruits] Spring from Love which is the only fountain of Good Works, they are Despoyled of all their Glory."[700]

"GOD therefore may be infinitely Holy, and infinitely desire our Righteous Actions, tho he doth not intermeddle with our Liberty, but leaves us to our selves; "[701]. The purpose of the Estate of Trial is the improvement and adornment of the soul but also the possibility of pleasure for God. It is God's gamble – the possibility of what he infinitely hates for the chance of enjoying what he infinitely desires. And in all of this he has given us the free hand. This is the astonishing fact that captures Traherne's imagination –

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[699] *CE*.p.78-79.

[700] *SV* 26r. That virtue and free will are inextricably linked is a ubiquitous notion in Traherne. As well as the quotations given above see also: *CE* p.25, 31-35, 78-79, 85,90-93, 148-150; *MSD* p23,78, 83-84; the Fourth *Century*; *SM* and *KOG*.

[701] *CE*.p.93.

that actions of piety freely wrought, those objects so desired by God that for their sake he created angels and souls and all worlds, are left to the liberty of men. And this liberty is not the perfect liberty of heaven, where all is irresistibly drawn by divine love, but the imperfect liberty of Eden, that liberty of absolute and very corruptible power by which the human soul may choose to do exactly as it pleases:

> "GOD adventured the possibility of sinning into our hands, which he infinitely hated, that he might have the Possibility of Righteous Actions, which he infinitely Loved. Being a voluntary and free Agent, he did without any Constraint Love and desire all that was most high and Supreamly Excellent of all Objects that are possible to be thought on, his own Essence which is a *Righteous Act* is the Best: and the Righteous Acts of Saints and Angels are the Highest and Best next that which Creatures could perform: The very utmost Excellence of the most noble Created Beings, consisted in Actions of piety freely wrought: which GOD so Loved, that for their sake alone, he made Angels and Souls, and all Worlds....That we might do these in a Righteous Manner he placed us in a mean Estate of Liberty and Tryal, not like that of Liberty in *Heaven* where the Object will determine our Wills by its Amiableness, but in the Liberty of *Eden*, where we had absolute Power to do as we pleased, and might determine our Wills our selves infinitely, desiring and Delighting in the Righteous use of it, hating and avoiding by infinite Cautions and Provisions all the unjust Actions that could spring from it." [702]

The unenviable position of God in this risk-taking is a point to which Traherne returns again and again. As both bride and actor in the great divine scheme of things, the human soul "may bear or forbear"[703], frustrating or fulfilling both the pleasure of the divine lover and the plan of the almighty redeemer.

> "So that all the Glory of the World depends on the Liberty of Men and Angels: and therefore GOD gave it to them, because he delighted in the Perfection of his Creatures: tho he very well knew there would be the Hazzard of their abusing it, (and of Sin in that abuse) when they had received it."[704]

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[702] *CE*.p. 92.

[703] This is a phrase Traherne uses repeatedly in reference to the fruitful (or unfruitful) union of the divine lover and the soul. See: *SV* 25v, *SV* 26r, *KOG* 365r, *KOG* 175v.

[704] *CE* p.91.

It would seem that God has tied his own hands behind his back and made human liberty greater than his own[705]:

> "The abuse of it [liberty] he infinitely hated yet could not prevent it, without being Guilty of a Greater Evil. He infinitely hated it, because those Actions of Love and Honor which should spring from the right use of it, were the onely fair off-spring, for the sake of which the whole World was made, and without the right use of their Liberty all Creatures, Angels and Souls would be in vain: he could not Prevent it without being himself Guilty of what in them he abhorred."[706]

What are we then to think of ourselves as human beings? We are creatures of immense power and liberty --power to frustrate or to fulfill the very design of God, power to change ourselves. We are in a positition where our desires matter. By the dignity of the high position we already inhabit as free agents, we have the power to become even greater. Already eternal beings, we may, by our desires and choices, become persons of virtue and moral goodness, fit for divine company. We have the freedom to choose and the power to act, and our highest and simplest choice is love; we may choose to love or

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[705] And yet Traherne holds that God gives us power without lessening his own: "all Power was put into many Hands without any Divination of Power in his own," (*SV* 38v). This is so, according to Traherne, because God augments his power through his response to our choices –either enjoying or punishing them (cf. *SV* 38v).

[706] This and the preceding quotation are from *CE*.p.91 Traherne reiterates the absolute centrality of human freedom and the wisdom of God's restraint in not superimposing himself over it: "He infinitely hated that the Liberty should be frustrated, which he gave unto men, for their more perfect Glory: he laid all Obligations upon them to use it well and deterred them (as much as was possible) from abusing it, but would not transfer their fault upon himself, because he fore saw they were about to do it; which he certainly had done, had he made their Power vain *himself*, after he had given it." *(CE*.p.91). Our abuse of liberty and God's honor in allowing us to refuse him are both reiterated on the following page: "That GOD should not be able to deserve our Love, unless he himself made us to Love him by violence, is the Greatest Dishonour to him in the World: Nor is it any Glory of Reputation for us, who are such sorry Stewards, that we cannot be entrusted with a little Liberty, but we must needs abuse it." (*CE*.p.92).

not to love. In such a position we are neither wise nor holy[707], though we may become both. And so we are in a position of potentiality, of possibility and of hope.

Hope:

This freedom of choice and ability to act, when married to desire, occasions the virtue of Hope. "Hope is a Vertue mixt of Belief and Desire, by which we conceive the Possibility of attaining the Ends we would enjoy, and are stirred up to endeavour after them"[708] writes Traherne.

Apart from his chapter on hope in *Christian Ethicks*, Traherne does not often mention hope as a virtue, though its origins and its qualities are much discussed by other names. Traherne's Hope is a hunger and a thirst, a mixture of love of the thing unknown and dissatisfaction with what is known. In the opening meditations of the *Centuries* he describes the hope phenomenon as the violent attraction of an unknown love:

> "For tho it be a Maxime in the Scholes, That there is no Lov of a thing unknown: yet I hav found, that Things unknown have a Secret Influence on the Soul: and like the Centre of that Earth unseen, violently Attract it. We lov we know not what: and therfore every Thing allures us. As Iron at a Distance is drawn by the Loadstone, there being some Invisible Communications between them: So is there in us a World of Lov to somwhat, tho we know not what in the World that should be. There are Invisible Ways of Conveyance, by which som Great Thing doth touch our Souls, and by which we tend to it. Do you not feel your self Drawn with the Expectation and Desire of som Great Thing?"[709]

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[707] "Power to Lov is subject to Miscarriages; it is neither Wise nor Holy. But the Act of Loving, in a most Wise and Holy manner, casteth out all fear."[707] *L*, 127v.

[708] *CE*.p.117. Similarly in chapter IV of *CE* he writes of seeing and attaining: "The *Understanding* was made to see the value of our Treasure; and the freedome of *Will*, to Atcheive Glory to our actions;" p.29.

[709] *C*. I.2.

In "Dissatisfaction" Traherne recounts the other side of this expectation of "some Great Thing" – the despair of the one who senses such a pull, but who cannot find its source. The disappointed searcher finds "nothing more than empty Space" in heaven above, and on earth is confronted with dirt, toil, dens of thieves, complaints and tears. "The Oaths of Roaring Boys, Their Gold," their wines, their lies, "Their gawdy Trifles" and "mistaken Joys" disgust him no less, and even books do not satisfy. He cries:

> "But then, where is? What is, Felicity?
> Here all men are in doubt,
> And unresolv'd, they cannot speak,
> What 'tis; and all or most that Silence break
> Discover nothing but their Throat."[710]

In *Seeds of Eternity*, this inquisitiveness and restlessness are a natural part of being human:

> "But man is an inquisitive and restless Creature, and Knowing that there is an Original and End, he is not contented to see the surface or colour of things, to taste their Quality or smell their odors, or take in their apparent Brightness or Beauty, but feeleth an Instinct strongly moving him to know from whence this Creature came, and whither it tendeth."[711]

Even when he moves beyond the most superficial to higher things "yet he is dissatisfied in the midst of all the splendor of Heaven and Earth and immediately enquires whither it began and what way the original of so Divine a Being, and to what end and purpose was it created."[712]

In "Desire", Traherne praises God for giving him "An Eager Thirst, a burning Ardent fire…An Inward Hidden Heavenly Love" which enflamed him "With restlesse longing

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[710] "Dissatisfaction" ll 66-70. See also ll. 23, 37-47.

[711] *SE* 143v.

[712] *SE* 144r.

Heavenly Avarice, That never could be satisfied,That did incessantly a Paradice unknown suggest, and som thing undescried Discern,"[713]. Like this "Heavenly Avarice", in *Christian Ethicks* Ambition and Covetousness are, as we have seen, two sisters who may carry the soul to glory and treasure[714].

That hope is natural to the human soul Traherne recognises as part of its destiny. But that unbounded hope is problematical he also admits. Dissatisfaction does not rest easily with Christian virtues like Gratitude and Contentment and Peace any more than do Ambition and Avarice. And for this reason hope is often at best neglected, at times denied by Christians. It is perhaps because we sense the gnarled roots of dissatisfaction twisted in with our shining hopes that we cut off our hopes and cast them aside as things deformed. And yet in so doing, Traherne asserts, we miss the chance to discover what is at the root of these desires; we resign our liberty and have the temerity to do so with pride.

> "Our hopes are nipt in the Bud for fear of presumption, our Desires crusht in the Growth with pretended Pietie. We silence our dissatisfactions and suppress their Clamour, we resign our Libertie and giv up ourselvs to an implicit Bondage, we see not the root of our Discontent and yet in the midst of all this corruption we are as confident and Dogmatical; as if we had all the Light of Holy Angels."[715]

And yet it is the very earthiness of hope, its tangled roots of dissatisfaction and ambition, that give it something of its value. To be hope at all, rather than a projection or fantasy, hope must have one foot in the mud. Just as the human is the golden clasp between physical and spiritual, so hope is virtue's golden clasp between spiritual and temporal. It

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[713] "Desire" ll.2-11.

[714] *CE* p.29.

[715] *KOG* 208r.

is a gritty mixture of faith and desire.[716] The temporal nature of our hoping may also inform our spiritual hopes: "Had our Hopes in *Spiritual* Things, as much *Sence* as they have in *Temporal*, those Beams of Assurance that enlighten our Hope and fill it with Glory, would infuse a solid Strength into our Desire."[717]

It is the purpose of hope to do this very thing, to elevate the soul by focussing it on ever higher ends.

> "FOR it is the property of a true and lively Hope to Elevate the Soul, to the Height of its Object: tho dull and drowzy Hopes make no Impression or Alteration in the Mind. The Soul extends it self with a kind of Pleasure in its Wishes and in touching the Possibility of such Goodnesses, as it proposes to its self in its own Imagination."[718]

The soul extends itself, by hope imagining itself higher and better, and by so imagining reaching new possibilities. The higher the hope, the greater the growth of the soul, and it is perhaps with this in mind that Traherne writes in the *Meditations on the Six days of Creation* "O my God, give me *Perfection* in my Desires at least, and make me grow from *Grace* to *Grace*, from *Strength* to *Strength*, until I atttain such *Perfection* in *Act*, as thou wilt in thy Son accept."[719]. But even lesser hopes may also be of value. Reaffirming the potential good in ambition and avarice, Traherne writes:

> "All that Ambition or Avarice can desire, all that Appetite and Self-Love can pursue, all that Fancy can imagine Possible and Delightful; Nay *more then we are able to ask or think*; we are able to desire, and aspire after (if it be promised to us) the very throne of GOD, and all the

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[716] "HOPE presupposes a Belief of the Certainty of what we desire." (*CE* p.117).

[717] *CE* p.122.

[718] CE.p.122 .

[719] *MSD* p. 23. For Traherne, the perfect marriage is humility of spirit with greatness of Desire; by this we may "aspire unto" God. (*MSD* p75).

> Joys of his Eternal Kingdom. And the more Sublime its Objects are, the more Eagerly & violently does our Hope pursue them, because there is more Goodness in them to ravish our Desire."[720]

Lesser hopes, appetites and pleasures may adorn superior desires, lesser hope being sanctified by highest hope:

> "Our very Appetites also being ravished with Sensible Pleasures in all our Members, not inconsistent with, but springing from these high and Superior Delights, not distracting or confounding our Spiritual Joys, but purely Superadded, and increasing the same....and the Hope that is exercised about these Things is a Vertue so great, that all inferior Hopes, which this doth Sanctifie, are made Vertues by it,"[721]

This is the high calling of hope. A right hope is a great virtue because its objects really do surpass all imagining.[722] Among Hope's objects Traherne lists our perfection and transformation from glory to glory, communion with God as a Bride who possesses his Throne, and the sweetness of the Bridegroom, the resurrection of the body , life eternal and all the pleasures and treasures of eternity, a world in which all objects in all worlds visible and infinitely rich are "Beautiful, and *ours*!"[723].

As with treasure, so with hope, right and proportional matching of object and desire make for true hope, disproportional or misplaced desire turns hope into false hope. And

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[720] CE.p.122. Later in the same work he writes: "I do not look upon Ambition and Avarice,... as things that are evil in their root and fountain." (*CE* p.173). "*Avarice* and *Ambition* may pass for Counsellors. They may do well to put a man in mind of his Interest, but when they depose Right Reason, and usurp the Throne, Ruine must follow in the soul," (*CE* p.96).

[721] CE.p.123. Traherne goes on "but without this all other hopes are Debasements and Abuses of the Soul, meer Distractions and delusions, and therefore *Vices*."

[722] See CE.p.123.

[723] *CE* p.123.

Traherne gives stern warnings about the importance of keeping our hopes fixed on superior objects:

> "I Know very well that Presumption and Despair are generally accounted the Extreams of Hope, and the only vices that are Opposite thereunto. But I Know as well, that there may be many Kinds and Degrees of Hope, of which some may be *vicious*, and some *Vertuous*: and that some sorts of Hope themselves are Vices. When ever we make an inferior Desire the Sovereign Object of our Hope, our Hope is abominable, Idolatrous and Atheistical. We forget GOD, and magnifie an inferior Object above all that is Divine. To Sacrifice all our *Hopes* to Things unworthy of them, or to be Remiss and sluggish in *Hoping* for Things of infinite Importance, is apparently *Vicious*:"[724]

And yet Traherne's regard for hope remains high. He closes his chapter on hope with the assertion that to be remiss or sluggish in hoping is as vicious as to hope for inferior objects, and that to follow hope is to be carried to perfect virtue. Without hope we are neither great nor noble; we are not fit for the life of virtue. We should lift up our eyes in hope of bounty since "to desire the most high and perfect *Proofs* of his Love, is the Property of a most Great and Noble Soul, by which it is carried above all the World, and fitted for the Life of the most high and perfect Vertue."[725]

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[724] *CE*.p.123-124.

[725] *CE*.p.124.

Chapter 5: Communion

Felicity as Unity:

Several critics assert in one way or another that Traherne's quest for a type of unitive knowledge is a fundamental influence on his style. For Day, the central reality undergirding all of Traherne's thought is the neoplatonic notion of everything united in the single undivided One. For Clements, Traherne is unitive almost by default since the mystical mind is dialectic rather than logical or dualistic[726]. Stewart, who sees Traherne's style as "open", "additive" and "expansive", eroding distinctions and collapsing boundaries of style, time, person, author and audience, and character into one great flexibility guided by "a process of association, like reverie"[727], suggests a Traherne that is not so much united as unbounded. The danger of such a loose understanding of oneness in Traherne is that it can easily slip into a kind of fusing of all things into one indistinguishable sameness; whereas in Traherne whilst God's essence is one simple being, his manifestation is multifarious.

Each virtue, for instance, must remain distinct if it is to be of any value. Traherne's chapter on Prudence in *Christian Ethicks* sees the virtues as parts of a body or positions in an army—only worthwhile as discrete but cooperative units. And yet Day reads the virtues as "so many variations on a single theme: the soul's union with God. Or

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[726] Clements, "Mode and Meaning", p.501.

[727] Stewart, p 209-210.

Felicity."[728] Day goes on to expand this notion so that the virtues are also one and the whole of Traherne's thought is composed of circles reverting to the same point – "a kind of dialectical spiralling and doubling back upon themselves of phrase upon phrase, word upon word."[729] It is not surprising that Day emphasises the cooperative rather than the distinct nature of the virtues. His whole reading of Traherne is a reading in which unity is primary. For Day, the central quest in Traherne is a quest for the transformation of the Mind into its original condition as Soul and thereby to union with the divine. He writes:

> "Traherne held a strict monist view, from which perspective the problems of spirit and matter or extension and thought were not genuine, for if the ultimate reality of everything is the single, undivided One, there can be no final distinction between spirit and matter; thus, no question can arise as to where spirit (or soul) is to be found or whether it is posssible for purely nonmaterial spirit to influence solid, non spiritual matter. Traherne saw no essential difference between spirit and matter and recognized through his own insight, supported and enhanced by his reading in Neoplatonism, that the material world is actually the infinite, eternal One viewed in and through the dimensions of time and space."[730]

And there is much in Traherne that seems to stand in favour of the unity argument. His prelapsarian spirit knows no boundaries and his soul lives in a state in which to be with and to see are one. And this is not just so in the poetry of childhood. "For not to *be*, and not to *appear*, are the same thing to the understanding"[731] Traherne writes in *Christian Ethicks*, sounding like both Meister Eckhart and Plotinus[732] at once. In the *Select*

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[728] Day, *TT*, p. 21.

[729] Day, *TT*, p.22. the subject of circles will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

[730] Day, *TT*, p.21.

[731] *CE* p.37.

[732] "The eye by which I see God," wrote Eckhart, "is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same – one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving." (*Meister Eckhart:A ModernTranslation*, tr. R.B.Blakney, New York,

Meditations, Traherne writes that we are so much a part of God that he could not even want us. And yet in the same passage Traherne admits that God does want us, by his goodness:

> "From all Eternity God included us, and therefore He could not at all want us, we could not at all be Superadded to Him. we could not be superadded to him, could we not be made His Treasures, we could not be superadded to him, becaus we were in Him. From everlasting He was before us, from Everlasting He was within us, from everlasting He was beyond us, with us and without us, from everlasting Infinitly present, near and Distant, His Goodness wanted us and that is His Glory. It is the Glory of God that he loves to be Enjoyed. Who Loving to be enjoyd we are the Treasures of his Goodness, because its Recipients. Blessednes Naturaly Loveth to be seen, and is Like milk in a womans Breasts more Delightfull in being Distributed, then in Lying Still in it own Fountaine. It curdleth there and recoyling upon it selfe; in flowing from the mother it feedeth a nother and becometh usefull. Delightfull to the mother while it is usefull."[733]

Even as he insists on the unity of all things in God, Traherne cannot escape the dynamic of need and treasure, of gift and receipt that mark the soul's relationship with the divine. Everything may be a unity in as much as Traherne's subject matter is the unified life of a dynamic cosmos, a world of time and eternity in one continuous motion of love from God to creation and from creation to God. And yet to say this without exploring the nature of that dynamic, its cycles and circles, its objects and subjects and communication is to miss the vital movement of that unified life.

1957, p.206.). "He who then sees himself, when he sees will see himself a simple being, will be united to himself as such, will feel himself become such. We ought not even to say that he will see, but he will be that which he sees," : Plotinus, *The Sixth Ennead*, IX, 10, tr. W.R.Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1929), II.141. The above cited also in Day, "Mode and Meaning", p. 506 where he notes the emphasis on the oneness of all things in both of these writers.

[733] SM.III. 79.

The Importance of Difference:

That an Other is necessary to Traherne's whole project is evident. Who that other is is a matter for some discussion. There is the other who is the reader, the public one and the private one. The first he addresses in prefaces such as "The Author to the Critical Peruser" in which he promises, amongst other things, to deliver in his poetry, "No curling Metaphors," but "The naked Truth". The preface to *Christian Ethicks*' entitled "To The Reader" similarly makes a promise, this time of leading his reader to blessedness by the study of virtue. In *Commentaries of Heaven*, his intended readership includes "Atheists" as well as "Divines", whereas the "friend" of the *Centuries* is an intimate. In *Select Meditations* the ejaculations of "O my T.G. O my S.H. O my Brother!"[734] and his admonitions to them as friends suggests the possibility of another intimate readership. And *Inducements to Retiredness* is written as an invitation to a specific kind of reader, one who has already embarked upon the pursuit of things divine. There is the 'critical reader' of the Lambeth manuscript who corrected, advised and criticised his work at manuscript stage, and the wide audience for which a work like *Roman Forgeries* was intended. But all of this may be no more than to say that a writer writes to be read by someone somewhere[735].

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[734] *SM*. II.38. On the significance of these initials and specualtions as to the identity of the persons indicated see *Select Meditations*, ed. Julia Smith, note 38. P. 161. See also Osborn, "A new Traherne Manuscript", p.928

[735] On the 'others' implied inTraherne's use of different personal pronouns and the divergence and merging of self and other in the *Centuries* see Webber, *TEI*, p. 226-238.

There is another Other in Traherne's work though, the "Som Great Thing" of the first *Century*, also present in the poetry, that object of his desire whose attraction forms the basis of his very thought. It is to this object that his work constantly returns, whether that work be addressed to a broad or to an intimate audience. The "Som Great Thing" functions both as a structural device and as a source of creative energy. It is from his desire for "Som Great Thing" that his imagery of childhood gets its poignancy, for his childhood, from the first recollection of it, is a lost thing, and the unity of object and desire perceivable in that early state is as far removed as the state itself. His effort to be reunited with the object of his desire is, in one form or another, the force behind both his poetry and his prose. His work on the soul, its powers and properties, reverting always to the recurring image of the soul as a bride, is a reflection of that desire[736].

DeNeef suggests that there is yet another Other beneath the object of Traherne's desire. This other is the Other of Traherne's own psychology "the unnamed Other, whose desire Traherne seeks to incite and address, who incites and is made answerable to Traherne's own desire, is the ground upon which the entire *epos* of linguistic re-creation is begun."[737] It is because of the continually present absence of this other that DeNeef sees Traherne as "preeminently a poet of desire"[738]. With DeNeef, I would assert that it is

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[736] See especially *SE*, *KOG*, *L*, *SM*.

[737] DeNeef, *TID*, p. 115-116.

[738] DeNeef, *TID*, p.116. DeNeef offers a reading for the Dobell poems that sees them neither as mystical ascent (Clements) nor as a birth-fall-redemption narrative (Day) and so may offer a fresh insight to the sequence. Certainly his contribution to our understanding of desire in Traherne's poetry is very valuable. But a problem with DeNeef's reading is that it centres on the *psyche* at the expense of

largely because of a failure to appreciate the centrality of desire in Traherne that he has been so widely misread as a poet of easy felicity. And with DeNeef I would argue that to understand Traherne in the light of desire is to bring important new insights to a misrepresented author. But whereas DeNeef's particular concern is to argue that Traherne's Dobell sequence constantly articulates Lacanian psychological structures of desire, my concern is to trace the presence of desire in his work as a whole, to understand some of the implications this has for his theology, and to urge a new, desire-informed reading of Traherne.

Perhaps the part of DeNeef's study most pertinent to this thesis is the attention he gives to the notion of object/Other in Traherne. Starting by citing Jacques Lacan, he writes: "'Man's desire is desire of the Other', desire of being recognized by the Other, of being the Other's desire, of being desirable to the Other, of desiring the Other. In Traherne's version of these dialectical and irreducible structures, the principal actors are man and God."[739]

Let us first consider God's desire for the Other. That Traherne's God desires has, I hope, been made plain in chapter two. God desires infinitely. And Traherne's recurring questions are questions of divine desire. *What* does God desire? *Why* does God desire? *How* does God desire? As DeNeef puts it, "Insofar as God is perfect, he does not need

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the *pneuma*, or perhaps makes no distinction between the two – this in appreciation of an author whose most central concern was the soul.

[739] DeNeef, *TID*, p.118.

anything; but insofar as He is God, He demands all." [740] But DeNeef would situate God's desire, with Lacan, in this gap between need and demand. And this gap is most often understood in terms of lack, absence, loss and want. Even in God there is something like lack. Traherne describes divine wanting not only in terms of a longing outward towards its object, but also, if denied, as an absence.

> "Infinite Love infinitely desires to be beloved, and is infinitely displeased if it be neglected. GOD desires ... the Love of his Beloved. And nothing in all Worlds but the love of that Person can be his satisfaction. For nothing can supply the absence or denial of that Love which is his end."[741]

To note the presence of want in Traherne's God is perfectly correct. Traherne's God is "from eternity full of Want."[742] This is not just the want of his lost and fallen creatures, though that particular loss enhances his desire[743], but a want that is part of his eternal essence. And yet this want is not a want of being. With Lacan, DeNeef identifies divine wanting with a *manque d'être,* which Traherne insists, is entirely alien to the nature of God. That God's desire is "infinite" is a mark of its capacity, not of its irreducibility. It is in this respect that God's desire is not like our desire. His want is an act of freedom, performed in accordance with his infinite goodness to the increase of his own and his creatures' delight. What DeNeef could not know is what Traherne clearly states in *The Kingdom of God* -- that there is no compulsion to God's desiring, there is no need or

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[740] DeNeef, *TID*, p. 118-119.

[741] *CE* p.251.

[742] *C*.I.42. "Or else He would not be full of Treasure." Traherne adds. God's eternal fullness and his eternal want are spoken of in the same breath.

[743] See *C*.II.31; *C*.III.83; *C*.IV.26;

necessity in his act. In fact, necessity and desire are seen as opposite forces –to act by "necessitie" is to act "without Desire". Necessity is the expression of compulsion, Desire the expression of power and freedom to choose.

> "It is the Glory of God, that he is a free, and eternal Agent. Had anything been before him to compell him, had he acted by an Inward Principle of Necessitie, without Desire, and Delight, he had been Passiv, and dishonourable."[744]

This is exactly where the desire of the human soul and the desire of God part company. For we are drawn by an inward inclination to the irrefutable beauty of our object, whereas God simply chose.

> "But there is this Difference between God, and us; God was purely the first Author of his own choise; … nothing but its freedom and desire carried him to the Act, wherin he delighted."[745]

So we may see Divine desire as distinct from human desiring. And yet there are points where the two types of desiring converge. Both human and divine desire is desire of the Other. And it is in this sense that both the human and God need an object.

But how do we reconcile the necessity of an object which divine desiring implies with the assertion that all things exist in union with the divine? Traherne's answer is that all things are in God in their origin and in their end, but that the soul does, nevertheless, have its own distinct existence. "All Things are in God because they are in Eternitie; and his

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[744] *KOG* 363r.

[745] *KOG* 363r-v. That Traherne makes this distinction between human and divine desiring is pertinent also to the question of whether Traherne's God is a construct of his own desire. Does Traherne's notion of human desiring indicate that man is made in the Divine image or that his conception of God is, in fact, an imaginative re-creation in the image of man? This is suggested by DeNeef (p. 123) and others. This passage from *KOG* makes Traherne's position clearer. We may desire in the image of God, that is to say, not only infinitely but also freely, only because we are in the estate of Trial. We are free to act, desire, choose, only because we are shielded from complete vision of the divine. Were we to see fully, as God sees, the freedom of our actions would be subsumed in the irresistible draw of divine beauty. (Cf *C.* II.97).

Omnipresence. All Things are in GOD, as in their Cause, and End. And Things are in him both realy, and by way of eminence."[746] And yet several lines later he writes of the soul that "Its own Existence is absolutely distinct from the Divine Essence,". We need to be distinct in order to enjoy ourselves and to enjoy God as an object of our desires: "The Essence of God is allsufficient to make his Creatures Happy: yet without something more then his essence, no creature can be Happy....no creature can enjoy God, unless it hath it self to enjoy in like manner."[747]

This distinction of the soul from God is necessary for God, in his chosen want, as it is for us. God needed us to be different or "distinct" from him. "He Wanted Worlds, He wanted spectators," Traherne writes of God, 'He Wanted Angels and Men, Images, Companions"[748]. Traherne circumnavigates the problem of Divine allsufficiency that this assertion raises by claiming that the divine essence is allsufficient by being able to create the means to satisfy its need to be enjoyed.

> "the Divine essence alone is Allsufficient, because it is able to prepare all means to make it self enjoyed,... for because it is sufficient to prepare all, it is All sufficient: it is Allsufficient without all, because it self without an other Help, was alone able out of Nothing to creat all, and order, and perfect, and enjoy all. Yet without preparing all, that is without the Act which the essence of God is, it is not Allsufficient,"[749]

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[746] *KOG* 360r

[747] *KOG* 360r

[748] *C*.I.41-42. As always, the want and supply are concomitant in God. Traherne continues, "He wanted, yet he wanted not, for he had them." See also note 746 and ch. two.

[749] *KOG* 360r. The circular nature of his argument here repeats itself several times – I have only included part of it.

And so Traherne's God has prepared an answer to his own chosen need, an Other to be the object of desire and in whose eyes He may be an object of desire in return. This is the origin of all sense of object and Other in Traherne.

In the previous chapter we considered what the human is in terms of the capacities of the soul and in terms of his unique position in the hierarchy of the universe. But what the human is may also be understood in terms of self and other. We may begin to know ourselves in the interplay of object and subject, in relation to an Other. In this sense, what man is is as dependent upon the existence of the other as is what he does. "There is an instinct that carries us to the beginning of our Lives"[750] writes Traherne. And that beginning is a beginning pregnant with desire. Desire is in the silence, and in the chaos; in the expectation of "Som great Thing", and in the abyss of nothingness. This is so for the individual human and for the whole human story since right from the first pages of Genesis the human experience is a creation *ex nihilo* followed shortly by a fall. It is as if we come out of nothing and fall into loss. And so the whole dynamic of desire is with us from the first. And it is in this sense that we may come to see the Fall in Traherne as more central than has been thought. For, as DeNeef notes, "the Fall opens man's loss – his wants, and his lacks—to the desiring urgencies of restoration, recollection, recovery."[751] What we are is constituted in desire.

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[750] *CE*.p212. Here he is referring specifically to memory, though this tendancy to re-collect one's origins may also apply to the quest for self-knowledge.

[751] DeNeef. *TID*, p.124.

It may be more in this sense than in any other that Traherne's humanity has inherited the effects of the Fall. For Traherne's human being is split between an inherited unity and an inherited disunity. By the divine light within us we sense we belong to the unified divine, but by our experience and the light of reason we know our loss. This is in some sense, similar to the position of the Lacanian infant who knows himself by alienation. The child in the mirror stage "as subject, is already being structured by alienation from himself, lack of wholeness, and nascent desire for reunification. In Lacan's subsequent terminology, the child has been photographed, mapped by and inscribed within an irreducible split or bipartition of being which all later psychic development merely replicates."[752] This seems to correspond with Traherne's notion that for the infant to perceive is to be, that sight and being are one, but it also suggests that this way of seeing the world (in unity) is flawed, based on a basic error. As DeNeef notes:

> "Consciousness, knowledge or recognition of self, is from its inception grounded upon a specular confusion and a misconstruction; what the child sees is mistaken for what he is and imaginatively registered as what he knows (about himself)."[753]

Where Lacan and Traherne differ is that Lacan sees the child's apprehension of the world as an error where Traherne sees it as the truth.

Lacanian desire is neither need nor demand. Where need is fundamentally biological, demand is also psychological. Desire is born out of the gap between the two. Whereas need is satisfiable, demand remains forever unsatisfiable because it issues from a psyche fundamentally structured on lack. "This means , I think," writes DeNeef,

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[752] Deneef, *TID*,p 99.

[753] DeNeef, *TID*, p 99-100.

"that desire is always situated in both a dependence upon demand and an imagined relation to need. That is, the subject must perceive a lack in the Other as the necessary precondition of the Other's desire. The appetite of the gaze, of the Other's eye, needs an object to see. So the subject responds to that appetite by objectifying himself in relation to a supposed lack. But the subject also recognizes, perhaps unconsciously, that the self he gives to be seen is not the self he wishes the Other to see. Indeed, demand is for the Other to see him as he really is, subjectively, not objectively. This wish, or demand, thus articulates a lack in the subject himself which the Other is then called upon to satisfy. Self and Other are irretrievably caught in what Lacan calls a want-to-be, and desire as such is born from the discovery of a difference (between subject/object, presence/absence, self/Other, etc.) which situates all being in that *manque-d'êtr*e, that lack of being. Neither the Other nor the subject is capable of satisfying this desire: I cannot be loved for what I am; I can only be loved as a signifier of what you lack. If, then, I am a metonym of your desire, you are a metonym of my want-to-be."[754]

In direct contrast Trahernean desire is constantly being satisfied, issuing from a human self essentially unifiable if as yet ununified, and towards a unified object. The Other is not only recognised as essential lack or abyss, but also as essentially full. And yet what Lacan is saying about the reciprocal nature of desire is very like Traherne. Traherne perceives a lack in his divine Other which is the precondition of divine desire; he perceives himself and all creatures as the object of that divine gaze; he is objectified in relation to the divine act. He wishes his truest self to be seen and desired by the divine Other, his wish or demand articulating a lack in him to which the other may respond. He becomes the desiring one and the divine Other the object of his desire. For Traherne, as for Lacan, desire is born out of a perceived difference.

In both Traherne and Lacan, desire as a constantly revisited process is necessary. Traherne speaks in terms of insatiability, infinite aspiration and eternal want – those faces of human desire with which we gaze upon our objects, by which we extend to the Other -- the self at once extended and recipient. In Lacan, the Other is a structural necessity for

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[754] DeNeef, *TID*, p. 113-114. DeNeef's "manque-d'être" here should possibly be "manque-a-être" the want-to-be rather than the want of being as in *Ecrits*, (Eng. tran. p. 259) "The truth of this appearance is that the desire is the metonymy of the want-to-be [manque-a-être]." (and translator's note p xii).

the existence of a conscious self and for any and all human relations. All consciousness of self is irreducibly grounded in the condition of recognising and being recognised by some other[755]. Therefore there can ultimately be no reconciliation between self and other – the split or distinction, the separation between self and Other *is* the basic structure of the human being. That is how, for Lacan, all being can be founded in desire[756].

For Traherne, as I have noted, being is not so much founded in as found in desire. This is where Traherne and Lacan fundamentally differ. For Traherne desire is not who we are but how we know who we are.

> "we search into the Powers and Faculties of the Soul, enquire into the Excellencies of Human Nature, consider its Wants, Survey its Inclinations, Propensities and Desires. Ponder its Principles Proposals and Ends... Wherby we com to know what Man is in this World, What his Soveraign End and Happiness,...by discerning Mans real Wan[t]s and Soveraign Desires."[757]

It is in the desire itself, that is in the interplay of subject and object, rather than in either subject or object as single entities, that a sense of self may be discovered. This is similar to what Clements and Colie say about where being is found in Traherne – it is in the

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[755] See for instance "the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other; the subject proceeds from his synchronic subjection in the field of the Other." (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan New York: Norton &Co. 1981, p.188). And "What I seek in the Word is the response of the Other. What constitutes me as subject is my question" (*The Language of the Self*, New York: Dell Publishing, 1975, p. 63. Here he is speaking particularly of linguistic discourse between self and other, whereas elsewhere he refers to visual identification.)

[756]The resulting theory leaves no room for the hope of ultimate unity, so dear to the likes of Day and Clements,who rightly saw its importance to Traherne; and it may be fair to say that DeNeef's work on desire explicates the mechanics of the process in Traherne rather than illuminates the end.

[757] *C*.III.42.

middle ground between subject and object. The experience is the concrete thing; the subject and object are abstractions.

> "The self and the not-self, subject and object, as we ordinarily understand them, are, in actuality, opposite surfaces of the same coin, the reality of which lies 'in between'"[758]

writes Clements. And yet, for the purposes of knowledge, they need each other as separate entities:

> "The real Self, as opposed to the ego, cannot, after all, be a separately, intellectually knowable object, for what, then, is it that does the knowing? The Self escapes itself into an infinite regress in its own attempt at definition. It can no more become its own object of knowledge than a thumb can catch hold of itself."[759]

Whilst the rational mind reiterates both extremes – subject and object -- the intuitive mind inhabits the middle ground, the rational mind setting boundaries or reference points which the intuition appears to ignore but depends upon. It is the relationship between the two extremes that is the reality.

Colie notes the significance of the two extremes of subject and object in terms of self-reference when she writes of self-reference as a mirror.

> "The reflexive self-reference is, as the term suggests, a mirror image; as in mirror images, self-reference begins an endless oscillation between the thing itself and the thing reflected, begins and infinite regress."[760]

This infinite oscillation both confirms and questions the uniqueness of the self:

> "The psychological effect of mirrors is that they both confirm and question individual identity – confirm by splitting the mirrored viewer into observer and observed, giving him the opportunity to view himself objectively, as other people do; question, by repeating him as if he

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[758] Clements, "Mode and Meaning", p.505.

[759] Clements, "Mode and Meaning", p.505.

[760] Colie, *Paradoxia,* p.355.

> were simply an object, not 'himself', as he so surely 'knows' himself to be, by repeating himself as if he were not (as his inmost self insists that he is) unique."[761]

Here Colie is writing of a re-created self, a "separated and objectified" self which she sees not as the 'real' self but as a "threat to the self"[762]. And yet, reflexive self-reference is the stuff of which any discussion about who we are is constituted. "Man's relations with himself are inevitably paradoxical"[763] Colie writes. To suggest then, that the object/subject distinction is necessary to self-knowledge whilst at the same time asserting that in their origin and end humans participate in the unity of God may not be counterproductive. Subject and object are necessary and they are real, they function as points of reference, two sides of the same coin. The reality lies in the middle ground, in the act of perceiving, in the substance of their union. As Clements explains:

> "Traherne's position [that subject and object meet together] does not constitute a denial of external reality or of an observing self. It merely asserts, affirms the truth, that object and subject exist only as abstractions from the concrete experience of perception, which experience 'includes' subject and object as the end limits of a single, integrated reality"[764]

Object and subject, self and Other, exist and must exist, for the purposes of self-knowledge but also for the purposes of action. Even when the human is not conscious of it, his need of an object is ever present, for the human's re-creative action involves a conscious opposition of subject and object.

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[761] Colie, *Paradoxia*, p.355-356. Whereas for Lacan, the mirror is the first step to self-knowledge, for Colie, it is both helpful and deceptive.

[762] Colie, *Paradoxia*, p.356. For further discussion of the 'real self' see Traherne's "The Preparative", and Clements', "Mode and Meaning", pp. 504-506.

[763] Colie, *Paradoxia*, p.355.

[764] Clements, "Mode and Meaning", p.505.

The re-creation in which we are to be employed is a returning of the world to its creator. "The World within you is an offering returned."[765] Writes Traherne in the *Centuries*. And thus returned to God it is more valuable to him than it was when first created. Not only is the world of our mind a creation that may delight God, but he has also given the human being power to offer the created material world back to him. "For GOD hath made you able to Creat Worlds in your own mind, which are more Precious unto Him then those which He Created: And to Give and offer up the World unto Him, which is very Delightfull in flowing from Him, but much more in Returning to Him."[766] Thus we may both create and recreate in our minds and in the world, respectively, offerings more pleasing to God than the initial creation.

This recreative act is, Clements claims, the natural act of the infant whose "simple act of perception re-creates the otherwise dead material world"[767]. In "The Preparative", Traherne's bold claim that the infant is a "Heavnly King"(l.30), as opposed to his brother

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[765] *C*.II.90. cf. "Is not then the Love which a man returneth a Magnificent thing!.. it is the most great and marvellous thing in all the World, and is in its own place of all other things most highly desired by all Angels and Men; and is the greatest Gift which (in, and by that Soul) can possibly be given." (*CE* p. 252).

[766] *C*.II.90.

[767] Clements, "Mode and Meaning", p. 514. In his notion of the elevation of the material world to spiritual, Traherne relies on Plotinus. Compare, for instance, the above quote and "The Material World is Dead and feeleth Nothing. But this Spiritual World thoit be Invisible hath all Dimensions, and is a Divine and Living Being, the Voluntary Act of an Obedient Soul." (C.III.90) with Plotinus' division of the Intelligible and Sensible world: *Enneads* VI. 9.9., II.4,4,8 and IV.8,1,49.

Philip's correction, which makes the infant, not King but heir[768], suggests that the infant is empowered to act as lord. The infant is "A Naked Simple Pure Intelligence"(l.20), whose "Simple Sence/ Is Lord of all Created Excellence."(ll39-40) and whose very act of perception is an act of creation. For the infant's simple sense, as a "Pure Empty Power", is free to receive and recreate, as glass or polished brass may do, the image of all that it receives. In this case recreation is like a mirror, the soul returns what it has first received, the quality of the image it returns entirely dependent upon the purity of the glass. The poem is primarily about the purity of infant sight, but Traherne insists that this disentangled and naked sense may be retrieved, and the poem ends with an call to the mature human to "Get free"(l.70) and to perceive with infant purity again. It is in this most profound sense that Traherne's man is to be busy about the work of 'enjoying the world', where to enjoy is to take in to oneself and return again with praise. This is our active work:

> "An Activ man is still employd;
> Till all things are enjoyd
> He never Rests:"[769]

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[768] Where Thomas wrote "And evry Thing / Delighted me that was their Heavnly King." (lines 29-30)., Philip corrected: "And all things fair/ Delighted me that was to be their Heir." at once both privileging "fair" things above "all" things and disempowering the viewer. This implications of the changes Philip made to Thomas' manuscript work are as many as the changes themselves and I shall not explore them all here. It is generally agreed that Philip's changes were not improvements. For details of where this is so see, for example, Margoliouth's introduction, Clements, "Mode and Meaning", and *MP*, p. 105-107; Day, ch.8 in *TT*; Sherrington's preface to *Mystical Symbolism.*

[769] "A Wise Man will apply his Mind" ll.41-43. Note here that the work of the wise man is to enjoy. Cf. *KOG* 334v where the 'Power to enjoy is more desirable and Blessed then a Power to Create." And *KOG* 340v in which Traherne claims that "No Power can Creat, that cannot enjoy".

The enjoyment of all things and the transformation of the world is the work of bliss. In "A Wise Man" the poem of fifteen stanzas from *The Kingdom of God*, from which the above lines are taken, Traherne outlines the process by which the human may bring blessing to the material world. In the first six stanzas he describes the life of the wise, good, holy, righteous, pious, blessed and active person concluding, in the seventh stanza that:

> "A Wise, a Good, a Holy Man,
> To end where we began;
> A lively, Righteous Grateful Soul"
> A Pious Learned Wight
> A Blessed man that doth controul
> The Powers of the Night,
> An Activ Heavenly Glorious Person is
> Employd, and Busy in the Work of Bliss."

That work of bliss is the transformation of the created world, an act of re-creation like that described earlier. With a certain boldness, Traherne claims of this wise man that "Being transformd, himself he is/ A very Spring of Bliss". Everything he sees, touches, feels is transformed by its contact with his own transformed self. "His fingers pierce, whatever thing they hold./ Like fire that alters evry thing/ On which it passes" he brings his own blessed nature to bear on all things so that "They also burn, and turn to fire,/ Love, Pleasure, and Desire."[770]

Recreation is also intrinsic to the very structure of the *Centuries*, as Webber notes, "Of first importance to an understanding of the book's structure is the relationship between Traherne's view of the aim of God's creation of the world, and his own aim in writing the *Centuries*. According to Traherne, a part of God's creation – man's mind—was

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[770] This and the preceding quotations are from l.81-82 and ll.88-90 and 93-94 respectively.

originally left blank in order that it might learn to reflect the whole creation. Such reflection – the idea of the world in man's thought – is the aim of creation, and more important than the world itself."[771] Webber goes so far as to claim that the recreative acts of the *Centuries* include not only the reflection of creation, but also the author's own recreation of himself and his reader who completes the book, "thus recreating herself (as Cherub)"[772].

Traherne is less concerned with self-creative action than he is with re-creative action, but either operation requires an interplay of subject and object and some sense of opposition of self and other. Craven, noting the contribution of Pico, wrote that:

> "Man's relationship to the world was changed because his self-creative action involved the conscious opposition of subject to object, which was not a once-for-all thing. This was why man's being and value could only be defined dynamically. But it also contained the polarity on which was based the moral and intellectual tension characteristic of the Renaissance; man's will and knowledge turned towards the world but distinguishing themselves from it; duality but not dualism, relative and not absolute opposition, transcendence and participation in mutual determination. The relationship of man to the world was understood, therefore, as a *coincidentia oppositorum* after the manner of Cusanus."[773]

Whilst I am not convinced that the main thrust of Pico's thought was self-creative action any more than was Traherne's, Craven's description of the opposition of subject and object as 'relative and not absolute'and of man in relationship to the world in the manner of Cusanus is completely apposite to this study of Traherne. For in Traherne's man there is, on the one hand the insistence that to perceive is to be the thing perceived, and on the other that the perceiver receives the thing perceived as an object and returns it to God.

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[771] Webber, *TEI*, p. 226.

[772] Webber, "'I and Thou'" , p. 259.

[773] Craven on Pico's contribution. Craven, *Symbol of his Age*, p.24.

The tension in which Traherne holds himself as both recipient and co-creator is the tension of paradox, the *coincidentia oppositorum* or "coincidence of contradictories" of Nicholas of Cusa:

> "The place wherin Thou[God] art found unveiled is girt round with the coincidence of contradictories, and this is the wall of Paradise wherein Thou dost abide. The door whereof is guarded by the most proud spirit of Reason, and, unless he be vanquished, the way in will not lie open. Thus 'tis beyond the coincidence of contradictories that Thou mayest be seen, and nowhere this side thereof."[774]

For Cusanus paradox is not just an intellectual necessity but a spiritual weapon. It is the tool by which proud Reason is vanquished.

For Colie, paradox brings us back to the ultimate unity of all things. It exists to reject literary and rhetorical divisions such as 'thought' and 'feeling' or 'language', and between 'logic', 'rhetoric', 'poetics' and 'experience'. She writes:

> "In paradox, form and content, subject and object are collapsed into one, in an ultimate insistence upon the unity of being. Thinking in terms of paradox, or thinking about paradox, one cannot rely upon conventional categories... One is forced to fuse categories, since paradox manifestly manages at once to be creative and critical, at once its own subject and its own object, turning endlessly in and upon itself"[775]

Traherne's paradox continually cries "both/ and". His man is both recipient and co-creator, both nothing and everything, the deep abyss and the pinnacle of creation. Man's

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[774] Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, p.44. Traherne's own phrases echo Cusa's 'coincidence of contradictories' almost exactly when he writes : "God is Fulness in all Extremes: Happieness a mistery in which contrarieties are coincident: And Glory an Abysse in which contradictions unite, and reconcile them selves." (*SM.* III.82). Cusanus held that one could reach knowledge or union with God through achieving a resolution of opposites within the self. For details of the influence of Cusanus on the central issues of Renaissance thought (Cusanus came through the Florentine Academy) see Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, Tr. Mario Domandi, (Harper Torchbook, 1963).

[775] Colie, *Paradoxia*, p. 518.

being is defined dynamically in the kinds of paradoxes implied by the coexistence of subject and object relations and of a unity that is the origin and end of all.

The object and subject need each other: light needs the eye in order to be seen just as the eye needs light in order to see.[776] This interdependence of light and eye is a notion, of course, not uniquely Traherne's, though it may be traced in his poetry and his prose[777]. In *Christian Ethicks* Traherne writes: "all satisfactions, Joys and Praises are the happy off-spring of Powers and Objects well united. Both the one and the other would lie void and barren if they never met together."[778] I would suggest that not only do subject and object need each other, but that, in Traherne, subject/object division and ultimate unity need each other too. By the one we are, by the other we come to know who we are. Ultimately what man is and what man does and knows, what he perceives are not discrete categories – the one affects the other.

We return again to the image of the infant, since that is the state to which, Traherne insists, we must return ourselves. As Clements has observed:

> "the infant does not abstract from experience and divide it into subject and object. He simply perceives, experiences; he *is* the perception, the experience."[779]

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[776] Day goes so far as to say that "the eye *is* the light, for without the other each is incomplete, unrealised." "Mode and Meaning" p.506 (italics mine).

[777] See for instance "The Preparative" in which the soul is 'A Living endless Ey", simultaneously both "*Sphere of Light*" and "Orb of *Sight*'. In "Mode and Meaning" (notes 8, 9) Day notes similarities between Traherne and both Plotinus and Eckhart on this subject.

[778] *CE* p.72.

[779] Clements, "Mode and Meaning", p. 505.

Whilst the existence of an Other is a constant necessity for Traherne's structures and thought, and for the working out of human self-knowledge and action, it is his belief that the soul participates in an original and final, and in this sense an ultimate unity that gives his work its simple daring. This is what gives his infant-eye recreative power and his human soul its potential for transformation. The subject and object participate in a greater unity of perception and being.

This being what one perceives may be illustrated by Traherne's account of the soul's lack. When you ask what man *is* (rather than his place in the universe). What he most simply and deeply is, his *pneuma* as opposed to his *psyche* (as Clements distinguishes[780]), you come to the image of the infinite circle. For the soul, figured as a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, is infinite, without *fin*. As Clements puts it, it cannot be circumscribed or de*fin*ed. "It will not sit for its photograph"[781].

In this sense the soul can perhaps most accurately be described by its lacks rather than its positive qualities. "the Soul is a Miraculous Abyss of infinit Abysses"[782] , a "Naked Simple Life...Not shut up here, but evry Where. A Deep Abyss"[783]. In chapter four I

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[780] Clements notes that 'I am God' does not mean 'I am God Almighty'—"For the 'I' psyche, or ego,... is one's conception of himself. The known created object, not the knowing, creative Act." As an illusion, the psyche prevents realising ones full nature. "The condition of the fallen man, then, is the sin, the error, of misapprehending his psyche as his essential being and of behaving, or rather misbehaving, accordingly." (*MP*, p.22-23).

[781] Clements, *MP*, p. 25-26.

[782] *C*. II. 83.

[783] "My Spirit" ll.2,17,77.

wrote of the nothingness of the soul as an image of the soul's capacity, the blank page of the infant, the clean slate, and so it is. But Traherne's skirmishes on the edge of nothingness reflect something of his spiritual journey as well. Against the claims of the likes of Itrat-Hussain and Robert Ellrodt who assert that Traherne never trod the *via negativa*[784], Clements and Colie assert that in matters of infinity and the essence of the soul, he is very much in tune with a negative theology[785]. Where Clements notes the soul as abyss, Colie notes the *horror vacui* that is present in the third *Century* when Traherne writes:

> "Another time, in a Lowering and sad Evening, being alone in the field, when all things were dead and quiet, a certain Want and Horror fell upon me, beyond imagination. The unprofitableness and Silence of the Place dissatisfied me, its Wideness terrified me, from the utmost Ends of the Earth fears surrounded me. How did I know but Dangers might suddainly arise from the East, and invade me from the unknown Regions beyond the Seas? I was a Weak and little child, and had forgotten there was a man alive in the Earth."[786]

The soul is an Abyss; it experiences the vastness of infinite space naturally and with horror as well as with joy. This experience of total loneliness is also recorded in "Solitude":

> "How desolate!
> Ah! How forlorn, how sadly did I stand

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[784] See for instance, Ellrodt, *L'inspiration Personnelle et L'Esprit du Temps chez les Poetes Metaphysiques Anglais*. See also Itrat-Husain, *The Mystical Element*, p.292. Here the author cites Underhill : "The two aspects of the purification of the self which Underhill calls 'the Negative Purification or self-stripping' and 'the Postivie Purification' or 'Mortification', 'a deliberate recourse to painful experience and difficult tasks,' are not to be found in the life of Traherne." This assertion is expanded in pages 292-295.

[785] See Clements, *MP*, p.27 and chapter one note 18. See Colie, *Paradoxia,*, pp. 145-168. I do not suggest that Traherne was ever primarily in the negative tradition, rather that the *via negativa* was not completely unknown to him. Most often, however, the negative serves as a contrast to highlight the affirmative way.

[786] *C*.III.23.

When in the field my woful State
I felt!"[787]

In neither of these accounts is the horror without hope. In the third *Century* he continues "Yet som thing also of Hope and Expectation comforted me from every Border." And in "Solitude", the "Silence", "Sorrow" and "Want" which grieve him are the result of his own blindness rather than experiences of ultimate reality. Nevertheless, his immediate experience of loss and of lostness is vivid:

"Ye Sullen things!
Ye dumb, ye silent Creatures, and unkind!...
Will ye not speak
What 'tis I want, nor Silence break?...
They silent stood;
Nor Earth, nor Woods, nor Hills, nor Brooks, nor Skies,
Would tell me where the hidden Good,
Which I did long for, lies:
The shady Trees,
The Ev'ning dark, the humming Bees,
The chirping Birds, mute Springs and Fords, conspire,
To giv no answer unto my Desire."[788]

The *horror vacui* is real, though the ultimate void it signals is not. For, Traherne asserts, infinity is full of God's omnipresence:

"His Omnipresence is an Endless Sphere,
Wherin all Worlds as his Delights appear.
His Beauty is the spring of all Delight,
Our Blessedness, like His, is infinit.
His Glory endless is and Doth Surround
And fill all Worlds, without or end or Bound."[789]

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[787] "Solitude" ll.1-4

[788] "Solitude" ll.41-42, 45-46, 49-56

[789] "Thoughts IV" ll. 29-34. See also "Felicitie" ll.19-20 in which endless space is 'No empty space; it is all full of Sight,/ All Soul and life, an Ey most bright,". Colie notes both Traherne's experience of the *horror vacui* and his conviction that in God's omnipresence there is ultimately "No empty Space". (cf. Colie, *Paradoxia*, p. 159-160 and p. 252).

In moments of self-consciousness, in which the self is a subject separate from its object, infinity is a lack. In moments of communion it is experienced as capacity[790]. Infinity is basic to being human, infinite space is "that first of Properties", "the first Thing which is naturaly Known."[791] And it is as essentially God as it is essentially us. We feel and know infinity by our souls, and feel it as naturally as if it were our very essence. It is in the soul because God is also in the soul and where he is there is his infinity.

The Other is a point continually revisted by Traherne. There is the other registered in the mechanics of reader and author, that other who is both audience and co-creator. There is the great Other of our deepest desires figured in the Divine. There is the other of Traherne's and of his reader's psychology, that sense of other by which we come to know a sense of self. And there is the other that functions as object, the thing known or perceived. All of these others are part of us, Traherne asserts, inasmuch as by them we know and are known. And so the opposition of subject and object, coupled with the notion of participation in an overall unity, leads us directly to the notions of communication and circulation. By the one gifts are extended and received, and by the other they are returned again in a process which makes possible the fullness of final communion between a subject and its other.

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[790] Compare for instance, C. III. 23 (*horror vacui*) with C.III.3 (the Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat) -- in the first of which he experiences lostness, in the second, both fullness and capacity. In both meditations the author observes and recounts the world of his childhood, though they seem quite different worlds.

[791] *C*.II.81.

Circulation and Communication:

For Webber (*The Eloquent 'I'*) the quest in Traherne is not discussed primarily in terms of unity (as in Day) or of the disunities necessitated in the interplay of subject and object (as in the section above), but in terms of communion. In an attempt to understand the texture of Traherne's "intentionally unitive prose"[792] Webber begins with concepts of love and self-love leading to a discussion of persons in communication and communion with one another. I too, would like to culminate in communion, but I would begin with communication, particularly God's communication of himself to his creation and the dynamic of gift and receipt that this initiates. Let us start with that most obviously communicative act – gift.

In "The Circulation" Traherne explores this notion of gift:

> "As fair Ideas from the Skie,
> Or Images of Things,
> Unto a Spotless Mirror flie,...
> Just such is our Estate.
> No Prais can we return again,
> No Glory in our selvs possess,
> But what derived from without we gain,"[793]

Traherne begins to speak of gift in "The Circulation" by using the image of the mirror. This ability of the mind to mirror back to God what it receives is a function both of its lack of spontaneity and its capacity. And the clarity of the image it returns is a measure of its purity. In its capacious but unfilled primitive state the mind is "like the fairest glass,/

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[792] Webber, *TEI*, p.221

[793] "The Circulation" ll. 1-3, 10-13.

Or Spotless polisht Brass," which does itself in its "Objects Image cloath."[794] Most often, in both his poetry and his prose, Traherne emphasises the positive aspect of this capacity and measure, expecting the soul to be its best: "as a Mirror returneth the very self-same Beams it receiveth from the Sun, so the Soul returneth those Beams of Lov that shine upon it from God."[795] And so may the soul become "A Mirror of all Eternity"[796]. Francis Bacon, one of Traherne's sources, also used the image of the mirror, but his soul is "an uneven mirror" which "distorts the rays of objects according to its figure and section."[797].

For Traherne, the fullness he experiences by virtue of God's gift of light is, in him, "the Mirror of an endless Life"[798]. In "Thoughts IV" he prays to live with God's omnipresence in him so that he may mirror eternity to the world: "O give me Grace to see thy face, and be/ A constant Mirror of Eternitie"[799]. As his soul is a mirror to the

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[794] "The Preparative" l. 52-54.

[795] *C.* IV.84.

[796] *C.* IV.81.

[797] *The Advancement of Learning*, Bk. I, ch. I,3. Traherne's notes on Bacon in *EN* (BodMS. Lat. Misc.f.45) reveal an interest in Bacon's view of science (He quotes from *De Augmentis Scientarum* on fol.71) and it is possible rather than clear that he read *The Advancement of Learning*. The difference in use of the same image may be viewed as symptomatic of the differences between the two men.

[798] "Fullnesse" l. 5.

[799] "Thoughts IV" ll.95-96.

universe, so thoughts are a mirror to his soul, by reflection making present what is past.

Traherne says of thoughts:

> "By you I do the Joys possess
> Of Yesterdays-yet-present Blessedness;
> As in a Mirror Clear,
> Old Objects I
> Far distant do even now descrie
> Which by your help are present here."[800]

God also may mirror to us. Through him eternity, which would otherwise be impossible to see since it is endless, may be seen by reflection:

> "Whose Bosom is the Glass,
> Wherin we we all Things Everlasting See.
> His name is NOW, his Nature is forever."[801]

And so may we see His wants and enjoyments, needs and joys together from all eternity, and eternity and the present all at once. In all but the last of these images the return or reflection is, as in "The Circulation" above, predicated upon gift.

The mirror is not an uncommon image -- all of the neoplatonists saw man as a receiver of images and Sterry was one who, like Traherne, made use of the mirror image in particular[802]. In her study "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", Marks notes the similarities between Sterry and Traherne in their use of the mirror image. But she sees Traherne as departing from Sterry and the other platonists in his insistence that the human soul is more than just recipient. For Traherne's infinitely active soul sends out (as

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[800] "Thoughts I". ll. 13-18.

[801] "The Anticipation", ll. 24-26. Just as God may mirror eternity to us, so the world mirrors divinity to us. In *TCL* Traherne writes of the creation: "And all these strange and Glorious works will be / A Sacred Mirror of the Deitie." (*TCL*, "[Manna] II", ll. 81-82).

[802] For other cases of Trahenre's use of the mirror image see: "Fullnesse", "Odour", "Amendment", "Thoughts I", "Thoughts IV", Thanksgivings For God's Attributes"; *SM* II.72, III.78; *C*I.31, *C* II.17, 78,84,97; *C* III.10; *C* IV. 84-86; *CE* p209.

intimated earlier), communicating itself and an altered creation back to the divine giver, not just because it is "fairest glass or polist Brass", but also because it is essentially communicative as God is. She writes: "The difference [between the merely recipient and the recipient/transformer] can be expressed in terms of the mirror imagery favoured by both Sterry and Traherne: Sterry's mirror reflected; Traherne's —somehow—projected as well."[803]

Certainly, Traherne's soul returns more than it receives. The whole task of "The Amendment", for example, is to explain that God takes greater delight in his creatures when they are offered back to him as enjoyed by man than when they were first created[804]. "That all things should be mine;" is wonderful, writes Traherne,

> "But that they all more Rich should be
> And far more Brightly shine,
> As usd by Me:"[805]

Is even more wonderful.

> "That we should make the Skies
> More Glorious far before thine Eys,
> Then Thou didst make them, and even Thee
> Far more the Works to prize,
> As usd they be,
> Then as they're made; is a Stupendious Work"[806]

For God, being pure spirit, finds the physical world useful only in its usefulness to man[807]. And because, as we have seen in chapter three, use and treasure are so closely

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[803] Marks, p. 533.

[804] Here begins an exploration of those ideas first intimated in the previous chapter under the heading 'Power and Act'.

[805] "The Amendment" l. 1 and ll.2-4.

[806] "The Amendment" ll.8-13.

linked, the world is really a treasure to God only in as much as it is useful to us. In this act of return, which exceeds the original gift, Traherne's mirror is unique. And he himself can hardly believe what he is saying:

> "Am I a Glorious Spring
> Of Joys and Riches to my King?
> Are Men made Gods!"

He exclaims.

> "And is my Soul a Mirror that must Shine
> Even like the Sun, and be far more Divine?"[808]

But fascinating as Traherne's mirror imagery is, the mirror is just one of the ways that man enters into the process of gift, receipt and return. In "The Circulation" Traherne begins, as we have seen, with the image of the mirror, but he goes on, from the most fundamental actions of human life -- we breathe out only the air we first breathed in—to eucharistic images of offering—"He must a King, before a Priest becom, / And Gifts receiv, or ever Sacrifice."[809] These words of Traherne's may resonate with the more recent prayer at the offering, "All things come of thee oh Lord, and of thine own do we give thee". In fact, in the *Centuries*, Traherne uses that very word, "offering" to describe man's return of the world to God. As we have seen in chapter four: "The World within

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[807] "In himself he needeth not the sun nor sea nor Air nor Earth nor Gold nor Silver; he needeth them only for our sake and in us only enjoyeth the same." *SV* 28v.

[808] "The Amendment" ll.29-31 and ll. 34-35.

[809] "The Circulation" ll. 22-23.

you is an offering returned."[810] What came from God goes back to God; everything owes its very existence to this principle of circulation:

> "All Things to Circulations owe
> Themselvs; by which alone
> They do exist: They cannot shew
> A Sigh, a Word, a Groan,
> A Colour, or a Glimps of Light,
> The Sparcle of a Precious Stone,
> A virtue, or a Smell; a lovly Sight,
> A Fruit, a Beam, an Influence, a Tear;
> But they anothers Livery must Wear:
> And borrow Matter first,
> Before they can communicat."[811]

In all of this, return is predicated on gift: "All things do first receiv, that giv."[812] Traherne insists. Only God can live from and in himself, whose "All sufficient Love" is "Without Original". He is "the Primitive Eternal Spring/ The Endless Ocean"[813], we are the conduits of his bliss which runs "like Rivers from, into the Main"[814].

That "All things do first receiv, that give" is not only the central argument in "The Circulation", but a first principle in all of Traherne's thought. [815] Just as Traherne's man

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[810] *C*.II.90. He continues "...Which is infinitly more Acceptable to GOD Almighty, since it came from him, that it might return unto Him. Wherin the Mysterie is Great."

[811] "The Circulation" stanza 3

[812] "The Circualtion" l. 71, this begins the final stanza and draws all the poem towards culmination.

[813] "The Circulation" ll. 78-79.

[814] "The Circulation" l.83

[815] Sandbank also asserts this point in his study when he states: "The one principle that governs the endless transformations of the mind is its inability to be more than what it receives from without." ("Place of Man ", p.124).

of the *Centuries* is unable to "Breath out more Air then he draweth in"[816], so also in *The Meditations on the Six Days of Creation*, not only is Adam reliant upon the first breath from God, but the apostles too, must wait for the breath of the Holy Spirit.[817] And the first principle of Traherne's circulation, the primacy of gift, reiterates the poet's dependence upon the divine.

I have taken "The Circulation" as a model for Traherne's notion of circulation not just because of its obvious title, but also because in it we see the whole movement of Traherne's Circulation from reflection on to what he calls 'transpiration'. Traherne may begin the poem with the image of the mirror, but he quickly moves in the second stanza to the cycle of human breath and by the final stanza it is the image of the water cycle whereby Traherne says of the soul "And all it doth receiv [it] returns again."[818]. We must penetrate beyond "similitudes" writes Sterry[819]. So here, Traherne has moved from reflection to images of inhalation, assumption, absorption. The thing received is not simply 'bounced back'; it becomes part of the very fabric of the recipient before it is returned. We are what we return, we return our very selves. By this we move from death

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[816] *C.*II.94. cf. "No Man breaths out more vital Air,/ Then he before suckt in." ("The Circulation" ll. 15-16.).

[817] *MSD*, p.81.

[818] "The Circulation" . l.84.

[819] Sterry, *Discourse on the Freedom of the Will* (1649) p.108.

to life, by this are we transformed from "a Living Tomb/ Of Useless Wonders" to "a Womb /Of Praises"[820].

Reflection and transpiration, the two kinds of communication suggested above in "The Circulation" and "The Estate", are explored in greater detail in *The Kingdom of God*[821]. Reflection happens via light and eye. It is an exchange of image, as such an outward communication. Transpiration is "a real communication of parts"[822], a deep and inward exchange of substance via emanations. The emanations of which he speaks are exhalation and evaporation, inhalation and condensation, deterioration, decay and decomposition by which one thing becomes another. That this second type of communication is the more 'real'[823] whilst at the same time the less visible is, to Traherne, yet another source of blessing since in this we may also learn a moral lesson about seeming and reality. Reflection and transpiration are forms of communication "Wherein there happens a Strange Deception. Or rather a Wonderfull and Happy

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[820] "The Estate" ll.6-7, 9-10. See also Stewart who notes (*TEV*, p.190) echoes of the circualtion theme in both "The Estate" and "The Enquirie" (p.190)

[821] "The communication of all visible and corporeal Beings is two fold, either outward, and superficial, or Deep and Inward. The one is a Communication of figures and colours by reflexion, the other of Spirits and Interior Qualities by Transpiration." (*KOG* 251v).

[822] *KOG* 252r-252v.Traherne also held to a 'transpiration of Spirits' (*CE* p.46) not unlike Donne's in "The Extasie" (ll. 15-16): "Our soules, which to advance their state,/ Were gone out, hung 'twixt her, and mee.". For a more material notion of transpiration Cf. *CYB* folio 12v: "Nor is there one Atom [of our bodies] that flies away by Transpiration, but God Knows exactly where it is, & can Bring it to its Place again."

[823] "That these Inward communications are more real than the other, is manifest, because these are Communications not of Shadows and Images, but things of themselvs, substances being imparted in their own essential parts and spirits." (*KOG* 253r).

Exchange, For that which is no part seems to be the whole Object, and that which is a real part is unseen,"[824].

Considering transpiration moves us towards what one might call 'Circulation and Science' in Traherne. In *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne invites his reader to "single out any sand upon the Sea Shore"(222r). Those parts, he suggests, "that we now behold in this sand, may herafter be dissolved. And when the particles are corrupted, or mouldred away, som of them may mingle with Water, others may turn into Earth, and becom one with it."(222v) He further singles out this one particle that has become part of the earth:

> "This one from the earth may be carried into a Root, or Seed, and breath up at last into a Spire of Grass, be eaten by a Beast, assist in the form of Nourishment, and pass into Flesh: that Flesh may be eaten by a Man, and become part of his, for a considerable season. Thence it may evaporate in a Steam, and continue in an exhalation, till it turn into Air."(223r)

From here, Traherne takes his particle on a tour of the universe, hypothetically stopping at the vortex of the sun, darting to a star, reflecting back via the moon to the earth, falling in to the sea, from thence into a fish or a whale or a dolphin, at last escaping into an oyster. "and mingling there in some transparent Drop, [it may] be fixed in a Pearl. It may come from so base an original to Ladie's Neck, sit at a King's Table, be advanced to his Throne, or Crown, or Scepter."(223r) Through the pearl, Traherne at once returns to his familiar symbols of authority and power and plays on the irony of a grain of sand transformed. From sand it returns to sand and thence to pearl, but that final transformation could be considered trifling compared to the transformations this particle has already seen.

The circulation of the blood also interests Traherne:

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[824] *KOG* 252v. See also "Atom" (*COH* 80) in which transpiration is detailed similarly.

> "For as by the Systole, and Diastole of the Heart all the pulses of the Body beat, and by the circulation of the blood (lately found out) all Life and Motion is maintained: This in the Microcosm is answered with an Universal Circulation in the Macrocosm: The Sun being as it were the Heart of the Univers, drinking in the Blood, and sending it forth continualy to all the parts impregnated with motion and Refined, for the Conservation of the whole. By that circulation, which is Infinitly Swift and Rapid, the Sun in an Instant transforming Aether into flame, and pouring it out in its Beams; a Gentle Circulation is maintained,"(*KOG* 223v-224r)

That he is here citing William Harvey's discovery that in systole the blood is driven from the heart and in diastole it flows back in,[825] reinforces the notion that Traherne followed the new scientific discoveries with interest. But Traherne is, in this case, most interested in the universal principle and its infinite applications. That the circulation of the blood may serve as a model for the pattern of the whole universe is more important to his purpose here than the details of Harvey's theory. He moves back to fire and sun and light, condensation, evaporation, exhalation, dispersion, rules of incidence and laws of motion, operations and emanations. "I gallop over all, and hastily touch but the Tops of things." he admits with no shame[826]. Urgency fires his work. The sun has captured his imagination, light is in his eye, and, in the words of St John, this Light is the Life of

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[825] See William Harvey, *The Circulation of the Blood*, trans. K. Franklin, (Springfield, Illinois: Charles Thomas) 1963, p.13 and 59-69. Harvey wrote two anatomical essays addressed to Jean Riolan (Regius Professor of Anatomy and Botany, Paris) defending this assertion. The first, 1649, was on the circulation of the blood; in the second objections to the circuit were refuted. In neither essay does his tone show anything but the greatest of respect for his fellow medic and one may view them as much as colleagues as opponents. "Prosper exceeding, most distinguished Riolan," he concludes the first essay, hoping "that all your [Riolan's] very distinguished writings may redound to your everlasting praise." (p.28) Similarly he refers to Descartes as "That very acute and ingenious man, René Descartes (to whom I am indebted for his honourable mention of my name)" (p.65) before directly contradicting his observations on diastole and systole. This reference to Descartes in the present tense (see also p.66) suggests the second essay was written before Descartes' death in 1650, certainly before Harvey's own death in 1657. In either case, Harvey's published writings would have been available to Traherne.

[826] *KOG* 225r.

men[827]. Light is the model by which we may understand God's communication of himself "from all parts and Quarters of the World... in every point and centre of his Immensity, without Confusion, Dislocation, Distraction, or Contradiction."[828]

And so Traherne draws an extended, chapter long parallel between God and the sun. "As the Sun shines round about the univers, so doth he on evry side throughout all eternitie: His Beams are not one Way, but evry Way."[829] "His Life is in the Act,& his Act in the essence. His Life is his Act:"[830] The Moon and the stars continue the analogy – "The World is like heaven, God like the Sun; the moon and stars like Saints and Angels"[831] reflecting his life and light. All of this analogical writing is fed by his knowledge of and enthusiasm for the historic and new scientific discoveries. From Archimedes' spheres and Hevelius' *Selenographia* to Robert Boyle's study of gases[832], he moves in and out of light and heat, "Innumerable kinds of Exhalations, and Influences" all the while lending

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[827] "το φωϖ ἡ ζωη. And the Light was the Life of Men." Traherne quotes "Thus speaketh the text of the holy Bible. An Allusion of Infinit depth; a divine and Eternal Mysterie, being painted out in a Temporal, an Visible, Created Wonder." (*KOG* 222r).

[828] *KOG* 228v-229r.

[829] *KOG* 232v.

[830] *KOG* 233r. Cf. "The Anticpation" stanzas 11-12. In *KOG* Traherne writes that communication is requisite for goodness, since until it is communicated, goodness is not goodness even to itself. "Having none in others, it hath none in it self. Should it pass on eternally without impressing in some other its own perfection it would be imperceptible. But meeting a receiver it instantly begets it self in another place, and is where it springs, and is where it endeth." (*KOG* 182v).

[831] *KOG* 235r.

[832] See *KOG* 237r, 242v, 248v respectively.

authority to his analogical claims from the vast array of scientific knowledge available to him. And at the root of all this exploration, is his belief in the basic principle of circulation and communication. Everything that is is communicated from God. And everything that receives communicates in turn, so that all creatures communicate with each other as well as with the divine: "Evry thing therfore receiveth from all, and communicated to all, after its Kind and manner....all beings exchange themselves for each others sake to one another, and are united together."[833]

Traherne extends his notion of communication even to the stars who "shake hands and mingle rayes at all Distances, and are sweetly united in a fair Correspondence."[834] ; and from earthly creatures to the heavens – what is an exhalation here is an influence there[835]. In all of this communication, circulation is implied. Divine communication is the gift upon which all return is predicated. And so we may see circulation and communication not as separate categories, but as parts of a single process of gift, receipt and return which

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[833] *KOG* 251v. Communication as it is most commonly understood, in terms of verbal and non-verbal language, is not the primary meaning of the term for Traherne and so I have not treated the subject here. That kind of communication is not, however, a subject about which Traherne is silent. His whole work as a writer is predicated upon the importance of lingusitic communication, in which he seemed to feel he fared better as a writer than as a speaker, since he criticised himself for "Speaking too much and too Long in the Best Things." For this and other difficulties he encountered in oral communication see *SM* III.65; the editor's introduction to *A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation* (1699) entitled "to The Reader" (quoted in full in Margoliouth I, xxxi-xxxii); and Webber,*TEI*, p. 223-225.

[834] *KOG* 254v.

[835] "The transpirations of the Earth are called Exhalations here, where they exhale or breath out; and Influences there, where they are received in; be it in the Sun or moon, or other Creature;" (*KOG* 254v).

is repeated over and over again. Communication and Circulation are, in fact features of a cycle.

Clements sees both Traherne's vision and theology as cyclical. There is a movement from childhood wonder and innocence through fallen experience and on to Felicity. He sees this movement as threefold and sets the chapters of his book out accordingly in terms of Innocence, Fall and Redemption. But he notes that the pattern may also be fourfold, following the four estates of Innocency, Misery, Grace and Glory[836]. In either case "This movement through qualitatively different states of Being may be and usually is figured as cyclical or circular – the circle being the familiar finite symbol of eternity—and it is to be taken precisely as figurative, symbolic, mythic."[837] For Clements this very cycle is what we should mean when we speak of Traherne's theme of childhood, for that theme cannot be separated from its archetype of Regeneration – the thoroughgoing change in one's mode of consciousness which is both the beginning and the centre of the mystic life—since for Traherne rebirth and regeneration and the theme of becoming as a little child are the same thing. Childhood is a metaphor for the innocent state and for the redeemed state. "There is a coming back again, as it were, to the beginning, a coming back again but with a difference."[838]

But what are we to think of a poet of circles, we who live in a 'post-circular' age, who can no longer believe in the 'circle of perfection'. Indeed, what are we to think of a poet

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[836] See *MP*, chapter one p. 16-17 and note 4.

[837] Clements, *MP* , p.16.

[838] Clements, *MP*, p.16.

persisting in the image of the circle in a century when that very circle was broken? For, as Nicolson asserts in her study *The Breaking of the Circle*, the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century and the "new Philosophy" that they spawned broke, once and for all, the old circle of perfection. When she writes:

> "For three hundred years men have vainly tried to put together the pieces of a broken circle. Some have been poets, some philosophers, some artists. They have shared a common desire for a unity that once existed, and have sought a 'return to medievalism', when life seemed integrated about a strong center, whether of the Church or of a monarch"

she sounds like she is describing Traherne. Then she continues:

> "But all the king's horses and all the king's men canot put Humpty-Dumpty together again. Mere fitting together of pieces may remake the picture in a jig-saw puzzle; it will not remake an egg. Nor can we reconstruct the old Circle of Perfection,"[839]

Traherne comes into Nicolson's study, not as a poet of the circle, but as a poet of infinity -- one whose imagination had been released by the breaking of the circle. Along with Henry More, Nicolson's Traherne has been liberated by "the 'new Philosophy' that no longer called all in doubt, but rather released human imagination to a spaciousness of thought man had not known before. The idea of infinity had utterly demolished the Circle of Perfection"[840]. Nicolson goes so far as to cite Traherne as "the seventeenth-century climax of the poets of 'aspiration'"[841] for whom infinity was a new sphere of

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[839] This and the preceding from Nicolson, p.105.

[840] Nicolson, p.145.

[841] Nicolson, p.173.

imagination, whose imaginations "could expand with the universe, whose soul[s] grew vaster with vastness"[842].

Following Nicolson, Colie also saw Traherne's expansiveness as superceding the image of the circle. As Colie notes, "Traherne found that the old images of a contained infinity, the sphere, the circle, the globe, and the ring, would not do: his concept of infinity forced itself beyond the 'circle of perfection'".[843] Colie contends that when, in the fifth *Century*, Traherne was "ready to transcend human limitations" and to "experience fully his own most intense perceptions of the metaphysics of Deity" he abandoned the circular image and resorted to 'real' spatial infinity which stretches out in every direction endlessly. And yet, she herself ends the same chapter discussing the Traherneian soul in that most familiar of images, the infinite circle. Her own intelligent reading of Traherne brings her back to the circle. Certainly Traherne was never slave to the image of the circle, but he never abandoned it either. When the circle of perfection is broken we then have an extended spiral. The pattern of the circle remains, with its powerful cyclical force, though the closure of that circle has been breached. It is no longer a self-enclosed circle, but a circle that extends into infinity. This is why Traherne can move his imagery

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[842] Nicolson, p. 171. She cites "Insatiableness", "Contentment is a sleepy thing', the *Centuries*, "Sight" , "The Anticipation", "Felicity", "News", "The Preparative", "My Spirit", "Thoughts IV", "Nature", "Thoughts I" and "Hosanna" as indicative of Traherne's adventures into infinity or exercises in capacity.

[843] Colie, *Paradoxia*, p.167.

of infinity from the 'circle of perfection' to 'real' spatial infinity and yet retain his cyclical imagery and style. He is not so much breaking the circle, as enlarging it[844].

Lewalski is one critic whose reading of Traherne finds his circular imagery and his sense of infinite expansion to be in harmony. She treats the uninterrrupted Burney manuscript as a sequence not unlike the Dobell sequence, claiming that in his treatment of its controlling figure, the infant eye, "Traherne does not so much blur or undermine the sense of temporal development or progress as transpose such development from linear to spherical terms.... The final poem, 'The Review II', indicates that the spiritual pilgrimage is not a linear movement from Eden to the New Jerusalem, but a matter of ever-widening spheres whose expansion is forwarded by meditation upon the things seen and the ways of seeing in infancy:"[845]

Thus we may see that the expansive stretches of infinite space and the image of the circle are not necessarily mutually exclusive images. When Traherne calls the circle by which Love is both the Cause and End of all things, convenient to itself as to its object, the "Circle of Infinity"[846], he combines the idea of infinity and the circle, at first more confident in his belief that this is so than in his power to explain how it may be so. But as

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[844] Cf. Colie, *Paradoxia*, p.168.

[845] Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p.364. Lewlaski notes light, sphere and temple as the three dominant tropes of both the Dobell and the 'Infant-Ey' sequences.(p.379,381). Stewart also suggests that the poems of the Burney MS, disentangled from the work of Philip, would read as a sequence similar to the Dobell sequence (*TEV*, pp.210-211).

[846] SV 28r. In explaining how Love can be the "End of its own Productions" and how "That is Good Which is is Convenient to another", Traherne finds himself tangled in a trail of assertions, and his marginal note "This King and Circle of Infinity varies more in Excess of Words, than in real Sense" reads like a plea to his reader to have patience.

he continues, his meaning becomes clearer. The 'Circle of Infinity' is infinite love communicated and reciprocated, extended and returned again to its original:

> "Infinit Love is infinitly convenient to all its Objects because it infinitly Desires and endeavors their Happiness. ...This being the Nature of God, He infinitly Desireth to communicat himself, his Infinit Goodness infinitly delighting in anothers happiness, which without a Communication of itself can never be attained. Infinitly Desiring to Communicat Himself, with the same Measure he Desireth to be received. And the Work whereby God is received is Good, becaus it is convenient to Him: perhaps I may say infinitly convenient both to God and his Creatures. To God, because he infinitly Desires to be Enjoyed, to his Creatures, because they infinitly Desire to be Happy, by the true Principles of Nature, which cannot be but by the fruition of his communicated Goodness."[847]

That this communicated goodness is spatially as well as conceptually infinite is part of Traherne's notion of universal communication. Along with Thomas Jackson, Traherne asserts that "he [God] is every where, because no body, no space, or spirituall substance can exclude his presence, or avoid penetration of his Essence."[848] Traherne's "circle of Infinity", spatial as well as interior, is both ways infinite, filled with divine presence and with human and divine capacity. That God is 'universally" communicative is "An Abyss of Wonders"[849] to Traherne. Like rays of light, which "coming from the East, fill the Hemisphere, and so do Rayes coming from the West, yet they do not clash, nor confound each other", so God's essence fills everything without hindering anything. It is absolutely necessary that universal communication should be thus infinite, for if just one corner

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[847] *SV* 28r. Cf. "all Nature heaves at and requires the Duty we have described. God desires in all things to be Enjoyed. Man desires to enjoy all Things." SV. 29r.

[848] Jackson, *Treatise of the Divine Essence*, (1628), Part I, p.53. In *CB* (under the heading "Liberty", folio 62v.i.), when Traherne writes about God communicating himself to us, he quotes Jackson, (*Treatise of the Divine Essence* (1628), Part I, p.189): "All the goodnesse man is capable of, doth but expresse Gods goodness communicative."

[849] *KOG* 229r.

were to be devoid of God's fullness, his omnipresence would be shattered. Besides, urges Traherne, it is the nature of God to act[850] and it is in the nature of God's goodness that this act should communicate goodness infinitely and to satisfy infinite desire: "Infinit Bounty must be infinitly Communicative, and Infint Desire Satisfyed;"[851].

There are other circles in Traherne -- recollection makes his life a "Circle of Delights"[852]. There is what one might term the 'circle of creation', set out in Traherne's *Meditations on the Six Days of Creation*, and alluded to earlier, in which all things proceed from and return to God. This circle is fundamental since, "We can never rest till we see all things from God proceding and ending in him."[853] More prolific and of similar significance, Traherne's favourite image from Hermes of God as the sphere, and infinity as a circle brings us continually back to the circle motif.[854] Of course Traherne is not alone in his use of this image; other mystical writers who try to discuss the negative attributes of God positively also revert to the image of the infinite circle whose centre is everywhere and

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[850] "His Essence is all Act:" Traherne asserts in "The Anticipation" (l. 91). "He is an Act that doth Communicate." (l. 99). "From all to all Eternity He is/ That Act: An Act of Bliss;/ Wherin all Bliss to all,/ That will receiv the same, or on him call,/ Is freely given:" (ll. 100-104).

[851] *KOG* 245v.

[852] "Imaginations *Reall* are," which unto his mind again repair, making his life a circle of delights, and "An Earnest that the Actions of the Just/ Shall still revive, and flourish in the Dust"("The Review II" ll.9-12)

[853] *MSD* p.82.

[854] Concerning the well-known statement that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere Patrides writes: "This famous affirmations has been traced (by E Gilson)...) to an anonymous work of the twelfth century, generally known as *Liber XXIV philosophorum* and attributed to 'Hermes' by Alan of Lille and others." C. A. Patrides, *Platonists*, p.36, note 1.

whose circumference is nowhere[855]. Traherne writes: "For being wholly everywhere, His omnipresence was wholly in every centre: and He could do no more than that would bear: Communicate himself wholly in every centre."[856] The image is one of immanence and of communication. And as such it marries Traherne's negative and affirmative theologies. The negativity or void, the abyss of the soul and of infinity is filled with the omnipresence of God. Indeed, it is the great Abyss that is God -- "O what a Wonderful Profound Abyss is God!"[857]. God's own Nothing is a most essential Something[858]. Like the image of the circle itself, the affirmative and negative ways meet upon themselves in a ring of oneness.

Day claims that it is Traherne's deep commitment to the oneness of all things in God that shapes his whole theology. And it is true that God as fountain or Cause and End is a common theme in his writing. Day cites Nicholas of Cusa who also held that all God's attributes were one, thus:

> "all theology is said to be stablished in a circle, because any one of His attributes is affirmed of another, and to have is with God to be, and to move is to stand, and to run is to rest, and so with the other attributes"[859]

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[855] This image is used by Dionysius the Areopagite, Nicholas of Cusa, and Giordano Bruno, all of whom Traherne may have read. See Nicolson, p.107 and Iredale p. 52-53.

[856] *C*.II.82.

[857] "The Anticipation" ll. 70-71

[858] Here I refer to Henry Suso who describes the Godhead as "unfathomable abyss". He adds: "by common agreement, men call this Nothing God; and it is itself a most essential Something. And here man knows himself to be one with the Nothing, and the Nothing knows itself without the action of the intellect,": Henry Suso, *Little Book of Truth*, pp 178-191-192.

[859] Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, p.12. also quoted in Day, *TT*, p.22.

and he sees the structure of *Christian Ethicks* as profoundly influenced by this principle. Its exposition of Christian virtues takes place "through a kind of dialectical spiralling and doubling back upon themselves of phrase upon phrase, word upon word."[860] Reduplication, repetition become almost incantatory, not just in *Christian Ethicks*, but at various points throughout in Traherne's works[861]. Stewart, Webber and Clements all note this in Traherne as not merely a tendency, but a fundamental feature of his style. [862]. But where Stewart and to some degree Webber see Traherne merging all into a oneness of blurred distinctions, Day insists that there remains, in Traherne's oneness, a sense of differentiation. This differentiation, like the interplay of subject and object discussed earlier, is necessary for the completion of the cycles that give structural form to Traherne's work. Day sees the shape of *Christian Ethicks* as similar to musical variations on a theme, as epicyclicar, returning always to its theme[863].

Sandbank goes so far as to call Traherne's world picture a "Circulation Doctrine"[864] and he notes the affinity this doctrine has with the thought of the neoplatonic Florentine

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[860] Day, *TT*, p.22.

[861] Day notes, in this feature of Traherne's style, a similarity between Traherne and the Quakers and attributes it to their mutual concern for inward truth, an intense desire to speak of direct experience, and a concentration upon 'naming' as the expression of reality. See Day p. 22. See also Cope, "Seventeenth Century Quaker Style", p.200.

[862] Of his poetry Clements writes: "many of the repetitions, ...are, actually also essential stylistic and formal devices of coherence and unity." (*MP*, p. 53-54, see also pp.133, 155,); For Stewart, Traherne's repetition is discussed in terms of accretion: "Traherne adds, adds even what has already been said," (*TEV*, p.210, see also p.212) which moves towards expansion, and openness.

[863] See *TT*, p. 28.

[864] Sandbank, "Place of Man", p.121.

Academy[865]. Ficino's influence on Traherne is well documented, and it is likely that Ficino's "circuitus spiritualis"[866] – "a single circle from God to the world and from the world to God"[867] whereby the world is returned to its intelligible form through the mind of man and thence returned back to God, influenced the formation of the notion of circulation in Traherne. But Traherne's own version of the theory seems to me to take circulation further. Not only does Traherne's man return, for a material world, a spiritual one, but he participates in the transformation of the material world into a renewed material world as well. This is the bold claim Traherne makes that ultimately separates him from the neoplatonists. He is not just concerned with "the spiritualisation of the material world"[868] but with the transformation of the physical world here, now. This is partly reflected in his insistence, noted earlier, that heaven is here and hereafter. It is this very refusal to abandon the material world that gives Traherne's work something of its immediacy. In Traherne the dualistic understanding of heaven and earth as entirely separate and opposed entities popular in the medieval mind, did indeed succeed to "a

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[865] Sandbank notes, for instance, though he does not trace in detail, the history of the doctrine of circulation, its origins in Plotinus and Proclus' dialectics of "Remaining", "Procession", and "Reversion", and the importance it lent to neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance. ("Place of Man", p. 121-122).

[866] *Theologia Platonica* IX, 4, in *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1576), folio. 211.

[867] Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, Second Speech, ch. II, trans. Sears R.Jayne (1944), p.134. see also Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, p.109: "Since the intellect enters into a real relationship with its objects, it can also give them something of its own essence. So the mind that thinks the corporeal objects changes their original quality in a certain sense and lifts them up to a higher grade of being by its thinking power."

[868] Sandbank, "Place of Man", p. 123.

Neo-Platonic sense of the unified life of a dynamic cosmos, a motion of love that comprehends all spheres of being, from "God to matter."[869] And that motion of love has much more far-reaching effects than has been hitherto understood in the common readings of Traherne.

Most readings of Traherne that concern either the return of an improved world to God by man, or the 'spiritualisation' of the material, locate the centre of action in the mind. Redemption is cerebral; it is about thinking; the work is the work of the mind. As Sandbank notes: "The spiritualization of the world by the mind and the superiority of the "Thought of the World" (C. II.90) to the world itself imply that by thinking it man improves it."[870] This may be partly because critics often refer back to Ficino's notions of the spiritualisation of the material for their reading of Traherne. But it may also stem from the fact that there is some ambiguity about the power of knowledge in Traherne. On the one hand he claims, "*Things tru* affect not, while they are unknown"[871]. On the other hand he disagrees with "a Maxime in the Scholes, That there is no Lov of a thing unknown" promising his reader to fill his book with "those Truths you love, but know

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[869] Sandbank, op cit. p.122.

[870] Sandbank, op. cit. p. 130. Here Sandbank is referring to *C*.II.90 in which Traherne writes: "the World in a Thought is more Excellent then the World," and "the Idea of Heaven and Earth in the Soul of Man, is more Precious with GOD then the Things them selvs,". For McFarland also, it is thought that empowers ("Ambiguity to Paradox:" p.122); for Uphaus, "man reunites himself with God on the basis of reason." ("Perception as Process" p.27.); Martz applies to Traherne an Augustinian concept of 'interior illumination', an "operation of man's intellect" (*Paradise Within*, xiv); Day writes of Traherne's religious vision as intellectual mysticism., *TT*. P. 14-19.

[871] "The Inference" l. 9. "...But Thoughts most sensibly, when quite alone." Traherne concludes the sentence. (l.10).

not"[872]. About this love, too he seems to alternate. He calls the power of loving "The most High and Noble of the Faculties", a faculty of the heart as well as of the mind, "not seated by it self in the mind, but attended with a mighty Proneness and Inclination.", in other words, attended with desire[873]. This appears in the opening paragraph of his chapter on Love in *Christian Ethicks*, yet he concludes the same chapter insisting that "VERTUOUS Love is that which proceedeth from a well governed understanding, and is seated in a Will that is guided by Reason."[874]. And so we may see that love and knowledge, whilst distinct categories, are not exclusive ones in Traherne. Love depends, to some extent, on knowledge, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that knowledge is implied in love. "HAD GOD limited and confined our understanding, our power of Loving had been shut up in Bounds"[875]. In as much as love presupposes the existence of the 'idea' of the loved one in the lover's mind, love may be seen as dependent upon thought. But thought alone cannot redeem and restore. Whereas it is "By love alone" that God is apprehended, "By Love alone is God enjoyed, by Love alone delighted in, by

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[872] *C*.I.2.

[873] *CE*, p. 44.

[874] *CE*, p.49. Similarly in the *Centuries*, he asserts that love must be "a Regulated well orderd Love Upon Clear Causes", a "Rational Affection" C II. 69.

[875] *CE* p.52. Here Traherne is explaining how perfectly matched is our love with its objects and our ability to enjoy them with their desirability.

Love alone approached or admired."[876]. Both his nature and our nature require that it should be so[877]. Ultimately it is love that redeems and restores.

"The cosmic 'circulation' is therefore activated by love... Love becomes a cosmic striving after perfection, the energy that makes the universe go. The Cycle of Being is a 'circle of loves'"[878]. The first part of the circle is the love of the creator for his creatures – love extended to all and each everywhere, universal divine communication. The second part is the human being's return of an improved creation. The dynamic of the whole is a dynamic of love. This not only explains why knowledge alone is never enough, and makes sense of the return of the world as more than mirroring since what we return is a world truly loved, a world, by its many uses made part of our very selves. The motion of love also locates the energy of creation in desire.

"Had not GOD from all Eternity Loved, had he never desired, nor delighted in any thing; he had never exerted his Almighty Power, never communicated his goodness, or begot his Wisdom, never enjoyed Himself, never applied himself to the Production of his Works," Traherne asserts in *Christian Ethicks*[879], "For all Delight springs from the

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[876] C.I.71. Traherne's 'apprehension' is not exclusively or even primarily an action of the mind; it is a 'taking hold of' which involves the whole self in a process of right sight, knowing, prizing, desiring, taking, returning. In CE (p70) , also, the soul is transformed by both knowing and loving, but whereas knowing is given only two lines in the text, transformation by loving is developed over eleven.

[877] "His Nature requires Lov. Thy nature requires Lov." (C.I.71.).

[878] Sandbank, p.132. On the term 'circle of loves' as Sandbank uses it see his reference to Leone Ebreo, *The Philosophy of Love (Dialoghi d'amore),* trans R. Friedberg-Seeley, and J.H.Barnes (1937), pp. 451-452.

[879] *CE* p.51.

satisfaction of violent Desire: when the desire is forgotten, the delight is abated."[880] In the year that Traherne died, this same notion that action springs out of desire was being expounded by John Howe, another 17th century divine. "Desire is love in motion, Delight is love in rest"[881] he wrote, "They are as the wings and arms of love: Those for pursuits, these for embraces."[882] Desire is love "tending to perfection": we move in order to rest, so also the spirit moves towards its object in expectation of satisfaction and enjoyment. Howe wanted to assert that desire is relevant to an imperfect state whereas delight is found in perfection; and yet, the two refuse to be so neatly separated. Finally, Howe admits, "*Desire* and *Delight* have a continual vicissitude, and do (as it were circularly) beget one another."[883] Desire and Delight self-perpetuating in love is exactly what the circle of desire is about in Traherne. But where Howe cannot quite make sense of the contradiction this implies between a perfect and an imperfect state, Traherne races ahead, out of time and into eternity where all things coexist simultaneously.

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[880] *CE* p. 212. On delight and desire see also CEpp 44-45 and 258.

[881] *A Treatise of Delighting in GOD*, London: A Maxwell, 1674, p.139. My thanks to Jeremy Maule who first introduced me to this Treatise. See also Howe's *The Blessedness of the Righteous*, in *Works*, ed. Edmund Calamy, I [1724], p.475: "Desire and Delight are but two acts of *Love*, diversified only by the distance, or presence of the same Object... *Desire*, is therefore, *love in motion*; *Delight*, is *love in rest*".

[882] Howe, *A Treatise of Delighting in GOD*, p.139. Wings and arms, pursuits and embraces -- this is strikingly similar to how Traherne describes affections: "Affections are the wings and nimble feet / The tongue by which we taste whats good and sweet/ The arms which a spirit doth embrace or thrust away, / The spurs which mend its pace." ("Affection", *COH* 31).

[883] *A Treatise of Delighting in GOD*, p.139.

Nowhere is Traherne more insistent on the coexistence of desire and delight than in, as we have seen in chapter two, his depiction of a desiring God. Coexisting desire and delight is also the theme of "The Anticipation", a poem about the circle of want in which God wants and has from all eternity, his wants perfecting his satisfactions. "From Everlasting he these Joys did Need,/ And all these Joys proceed/ From Him Eternaly." Traherne writes, "His Endless Wants and His Enjoyments be/ From all eternitie;/ Immutable in Him:"[884]. Everywhere in the poem we find completed circles. The end is, from everlasting, the fountain, having caused all to be; "The End and the Fountain differ but in Name."[885]. The end being complete, the means must needs be so, Traherne continues, the fountain, means and end at once complete, at once each other. Similarly, wants and enjoyments complete each other, His wants lending value to all, His satisfactions delighting his wants. Taking this one step further, Traherne moves the business of desire and delight into the human realm and into the circle of gift and receipt. God's desire is "To be by all possest;/ His Love makes others Blest."[886] And so, by receiving we actually give to God – "All Receivers are/ In Him, all Gifts,"[887]. These circles of desire and delight, of end and fountain, of gift and receipt are, Traherne

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[884] "The Anticipation" ll. 19-21 and 55-57.

[885] "The Anticipation" l.36.

[886] "The Anticipation" ll.95-96.

[887] "The Anticipation" ll.106-107.

believed, manifestations of God's communicative nature, part of the very essence of God and his glory:

> "His Essence is all Act: He did, that He
> All Act might always be.
> His Nature burns like fire:
> His Goodness infinitly doth desire,
> To be by all possest;
> His Love makes others Blest.
> It is the Glory of his High Estate,
> And that which I for ever more Admire
> He is an Act that doth Communicate."[888]

That in Traherne communication is God's glory is also noted by DeNeef who defines 'glory' as synonymous in Traherne's mind with that giving/receiving motion of love he calls circulation or communication. But DeNeef's understanding of communication and circulation is essentially about reversibility or reflection rather than about transformation. DeNeef writes:

> "God is the object of man's Eye, not because man can necessarily see God, but because he requires a mirror-object in order to see himself. What he sees, in fact, is himself reflected in the sight of God. ...the power and capacity of man's Eye is the precise mirror-image of God's Eye. As Eye is to object, so Deity is to soul and so soul is to Deity. The reversibility of the optical operation structures all of Traherne's most important ideas and images: center and sphere, spring and fountain, origin and end, self and other, essence and act. Traherne calls the capacity of reversibility 'circulation' or 'communication'."[889]

To discuss divine communication in terms such as these seems to me to miss that most vital quality of divine communication – love. In his *Meditation on the Six Days*, Traherne

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[888] "The Anticipation" ll. 91-99. See also *CE* in which God desires love from us, ... His goodness desires to communicate itself...his blessedness is the pleasure of communication to all others and of receiving...his Glory desires to be seen, his love desires to be beloved and to make its object blessed. (*CE* p.56).

[889] *TID*, p.28. DeNeef is not alone in understanding 'communication' as a kind of reversibility. Colie, Marks, and Sherrington also use similar terms.

uses the image of breath to convey the tender and passionate nature of God's communication of himself to his creation:

> "The Breath which God inspired into the Soul of man, proceeded from him with so great a Love, as if he had drawn it from his very Bowels, and breathed his very Heart into the Body of Man;...Justly is the Soul of Man called the Breath of God, for he desireth, after a sort, to draw it in again, the soul issuing from him, and returning to him."[890]

Circulation and Communication as Traherne describes it here is neither optical nor illusionary, but profoundly intimate and essential – an act of love that should be answered with praise. Traherne certainly follows this pattern in his *Meditations on the Six Days*, since shortly after the passage cited above he exclaims:

> "O thou inexhausted, undrainable Ocean of everlasting Goodness, I praise thee for communicating unto us thine incommunicable Attributes, and making us Partakers of thine eternal Glory."[891]

That praise is the appropriate response to the communication of divine goodness is clear in Traherne, but I do no more than note this here since I shall deal more fully with the issue of praise and gratitude in the final section of this chapter. The communication of his goodness may be God's first and most urgent desire, the desire out of which all creation rises, and in which creation is sustained. But capacity for communication is also a gift he has given to us. "To receive all is sweet, but to communicate all is infinitely beyond all that can be sweet"[892] Traherne affirms. In fact, to be hindered from communicating is to be stifled and destroyed. Using again the image of breath to describe communication, Traherne writes "Breath with the same necessity must be let out, as it is taken in. A man dies as certainly by the confinement, as the want of it. To shut it up and

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[890] *MSD*, p.81.

[891] *MSD* p.88.

[892] *CE* p.258.

deny it are in effect the same."[893] Being vessels of the love we have received, we may and must give joy and feel joy in knowing that we occasion joy in others. In a circle that Traherne calls "Revolution" and "Reciprocation" the human being may enjoy its own emanations of love as God does, communicating something of the divine goodness it has received and so participating in circulation and communicaton not only as recipient/ returner, but also as giver unto others – to angels and men and all creatures:

> "That Body is the living Vessel of eternal Glory, into which Love shall pour forth all its Emanations, ...which it shall ever ravish by the Sweetness of its Operations; for occasioning all Joy in others, by a grateful Revolution feeleth it in it self, and by as strong Reciprocation is mightily affected with what it occasions, so that with Joy it enjoyeth its own Emanations, and receiveth the Joy of being beloved by all others... so that Angels and Men are its treasures, and God for loving Angels and Men, and all Creatures that dignify them;"[894]

This brings us finally to the idea of communion, that region where the circles of communication and circulation overlap so that the giver and the recipient enjoy and give, delight and desire in mutual benefit and bliss.

Communion:

Communion and Union:

"Felicitie consisteth in two Joys, the Joy of communicating and the Joy of receiving"[895] Traherne proclaims in *The Kingdom of God*. And the mutual benefit and bliss of giver and receiver is nowhere more naturally and eloquently seen than in the image of the lover

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[893] *CE* p.259.

[894] *MSD* p.89.

[895] *KOG* 198v.

and the beloved, an image about which I wrote in chapter two and to which I would now briefly return.

First let us consider the bride. Traherne's bride fills several roles, the most frequent being the role of recipient of what God has prepared, a kind of audience for divine expression and a receiver of divine gifts, as in the *Meditations on the Six Days of Creation*: "As a King having builded his Palace, and furnish'd it with Provisions, bringeth in his Bride, even so God having finish'd the world brought in Man, to the Possession of it."[896] Similarly in *Select Meditations* Traherne writes: "We [are] the Bride who He Designeth to Please and Delight, we the End to which He referreth and Disposeth all things."[897]

Being the bride may give the supplicant the right to be heard. "O remember how all Thy Lov Terminates in me:How I am made thy Bride,"[898] prays Traherne. Or it may be a position we are given in order that we may please God most fully by participating in his design of gift and receipt.[899] The fact that we have received may be what makes us capable of being the bride in the first place[900]. Traherne may use the term 'bride' in order

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[896] *MSD* p.72.

[897] *SM*.IV.7. On the gift of husband to wife of possessions see also *KOG* 199v.

[898] *SM*.I.82. "I beseech Thee to hear my Daylie prayers." Traherne has pleaded a few lines earlier.

[899] "Being endued with power to keep his laws I am advanced to his Throne; and to do that which above all Things in Heaven and Earth he desireth: and therein I am made His Bride to Delight Him." (*SM*.II.5.) See also *SM*.III.43, *ITR* 10v.

[900] *SM*.IV.4.

to remind us of our worth and value. "O Prize thy selfe as thy God prizeth Thee."[901] Traherne urges his reader. This is especially true in those extracts from *The Kingdom of God* seen in chapter two in which the Bride is also the Queen, exalted to a throne and honoured above all.

In all of this, the Bride is marked by her difference from the bridegroom. As recipient, as supplicant, even as honoured and exalted one, her distinguishing characteristic is that she is something separate, a specific and distinct entity. She is something other. Traherne makes this explicit when he writes in *The Kingdom of God*: "His Bride must hav som things peculiar to her sex, which God himself doth not enjoy, unless it be in her:"[902].

It is when Traherne speaks of the Wife as opposed to the Bride that the dynamic shifts from giver and receiver to a dynamic of union. In *The Kingdom of God* (200r), Traherne begins with an exposition of the Pauline advice on husbands and wives and then takes St Paul's line that "He that loveth his wife loveth himself" as a springboard into the mystery of two becoming one.

> "This is a great Mysterie, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. You see the apostle maketh use of this Instance, and leightly toucheth many Mysteries of Lov unto us...The Husband ought to giv himself to his Wife, and not his Gifts."[903]

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[901] *SM*.IV.50.

[902] *KOG* 364v. Cf. *CE* ch XXXI "Of Magnificence" in which also our greatness lies in being able to offer something distinctly separate to God: "our Magnificence must be shewn in something he cannot do, unless he were in our Circumstance,...He cannot be the Soul of any of his Creatures; but would be the Soul of that Soul:" (*CE* p.252-253).

[903] *KOG* 200r-200v.

Ultimately, "his Wife is himself"[904] Traherne concludes, seeming to collapse the distinction between the two. So, in this image of the soul as wife, the soul and God may truly become one. Indeed all things, it would seem, may be one in God. Traherne writes of God: "He is pure Life, Knowledg, and Desire, from which all things flow : Pure Wisdom Goodness and Lov to which all Things return."[905] And it is easy to interpret this as a statement of the oneness of all things since the source and the destination of everything is the same. And yet the ebb and flow he describes here requires two separate states: empty/ full, in/ out, gift/ return.

The two ways of reading such statements raises the question of whether we understand felicity ultimately as a union or a communion with God, and this problem is concomitant with the more general problem of object we have seen earlier in this thesis. Traherne asserts the union of all in God whilst at the same time both reiterating the dynamic of gift and receipt and also insisting on the necessity of an object; and the object is a theme to which he constantly returns. There are those who would see Traherne's whole thesis as a breaking down of boundaries, one long stretch towards infinity and eternity, and a proclamation of ultimate unity[906]. But I cannot help being always confronted with Traherne's ubiquitous object and I find myself asking -- Is communion or union the more

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[904] *KOG* 200v.

[905] *C*.II.19.

[906] Day and Stewart for instance.

approriate term? Neither communion nor union are terms much used in the poetry[907]. Union with God becomes more important in the *Select Meditations*. Communion features in and *The Kingdom of God*. Critically speaking, whereas unity is a term favoured by Stewart and Day, communion is a term favoured by Joan Webber, who, in *The Eloquent I*, sees disunity as primary in Traherne[908].

Webber's particular purpose in *The Eloquent I* is the exploration of the self in seventeenth century prose, particularly the development of a literary self-consciousness (ie. the awareness that the writer is the subject of his own prose whether he is writing autobiographically or not) on the part of the writers of that age[909]. In Traherne, authorial self-consciousness is companion to his reader's understanding of his/her own conscious self; his insights are our insights, his journey the journey he wishes us to make. Self-consciousness is vital to Traherne's whole project since it is only as a conscious self that Traherne's man can reach the kind of maturity necessary to become a vehicle for redemption. As Sandbank reminds us: "The 'Infant Ey' may be a perfect instrument of

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[907] Guffey's *Condordance* records no instances of 'communion' and only two of 'union'. The *Concordance* does not include poems from *SM*, *COH*, anything from the Lambeth MS, or *TCL*.

[908] Webber, *TEI*, p.221.

[909] She sees this period as unique since she claims earlier writers by and large, did not consider the nature of selfhood. The eight writers she considers (amongst whom is Traherne) "are also different from writers of the Romantic age, who flaunt their lonely individuality, and from those after the mid-nineteenth century, whose thought is increasingly served by a highly technical vocabulary of self-analysis." (*TEI* p3.).

reception; it cannot, however, act upon the world and restore it back to God."[910] That is the task of the self- concious adult mind.

It is of this mind maturing towards adulthood that Webber speaks when she notes that: "Traherne begins with disunities and disharmonies"[911]. These are not the first things he perceives in his infant state, but they are where his adult self, that recreative self, must begin its work. The recreative human must participate in God's act of continued creation, must feel the separations and yet from moment to moment hold the frame of things entire. Desire, I would suggest, is a primary tool in this reconstruction, for it acknowledges the real separate existence of a subject and object whilst at the same time urging the extension of each to fill the breach. Thus it may be that out of the very separations and disunities of the world, rather than in spite of or in disregard of them, Traherne builds his felicity. Webber sees this overcoming of separation in many levels of Traherne's work:

> "The physical and spiritual separation of man from God, writer from reader, man from man, moment from moment, meaning from meaning, and even clause from clause, is accepted and then transcended, as Traherne builds upon these separations the harmonies of his style."[912]

She notes that his prose is always a dialogue – in a process of communication, and that even the words are in communion with one another[913]. She notes the relationships between words: "For Traherne, words like 'borders', 'limits', 'coasts', and gulfs' are negative. Words like 'endless', 'infinite', 'illimited', 'eternal' and 'everlasting' are

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[910] Sandbank, "Place of Man" p. 126.

[911] Webber, *TEI*, p.221.

[912] Webber, *TEI*, p.221.

[913] Webber, "I and Thou", pp. 261-262.

ubiquitous and highly positive."[914]. There is communion in his paragraphs and sentences[915]. Webber goes so far as to assert that

> "The urgency of this united theme [communion and the sustenance of reality from moment to moment] is wholly and uniquely revealed everywhere in his style, from its most obvious to its most apparently casual details—from imagery and wordplay to the rhythm and punctuation of his sentences."[916].

and that:

> "The design of the *Centuries of Meditations* is wholly informed by the importance of communion, as is made apparent by the many ways in which the personae of the book – its 'I's and 'he's and 'Thou's – appear and meet and intermingle."[917]

Webber is not unaware of the other theme of unity in Traherne. And she admits that things separate do sometimes become one another in his work. But this, she claims, is only possible because of primary separation. "Things separate are made to approve, affirm, become one another, but the merging can only be because the separation already is."[918]

That communion rather than union may be a model of bliss is suggested not only by Traherne's insistent descriptions of the communion of all persons in heaven, but also by

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[914] Webber, *TEI*, p. 240.

[915] Webber, "I and Thou", pp.262-263.

[916] Webber, *TEI*, p. 243.

[917] Webber, *TEI*, p.226.

[918] Webber, *TEI*, p.243.

the fact that in Traherne the value of all things is relational. As we have seen in chapter three, a thing is treasure only because of its use to something other than itself[919].

On another level, the level of God and the soul, Traherne's insistence on the importance of difference is reminiscent of Ficino's theory of love according to which "The two lives, God's and man's are made one while yet remaining two."[920]

And yet, Traherne also speaks of a union with God so complete that even here on earth we may experience something of it. In the sacrament of the eucharist God is communicated to us so fully that he becomes a part of us and we of him.

> "Those that think our union with God so Incredible, are taught more in the Sacrament. He gives Himselfe to be our food. is united to us. Incorporated in us. for what doth he intimate by the Bread and wine, but as the Bread and wine are mingled with our flesh, and is nourishment diffused through all our members, So he is Lov mingling with our Lov as flame with flame, Knowledge shining in our knowledge as Light with Light, an omnipresent sphere within our sphere."[921]

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[919] "That any thing may be found to be an infinit Treasure, its Place must be found in Eternity, and in Gods Esteem. For as there is a Time, so there is a Place for all Things. Evry thing in its Place is Admirable Deep and Glorious: out of its Place like a Wandering Bird, is Desolat and Good for Nothing. How therfore it relateth to God and all Creatures must be seem before it can be Enjoyed....Divest it of these Operations, and Divide it from these Objects, it is Useless and Good for nothing and therfore Worthless, because Worthless and Useless go together." (*C.* III. 55).

[920] Nesca Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, p.68. Here the author is expanding Ficino's theory of love.

[921] *SM*.II.66.

Several meditations later, Traherne cries: "O my soul admire the Perfection of thy union with God"[922]. When Traherne writes of this kind of union it is most often in the context of love.

> "But the union of our Soul with God is the more Sublime. He being more us by the force of Love then our very selves... By seeing and Loveing Him we are Transformed into Him, become his Similitude, feel his Blessedness, Enjoy his Glory, possess his Treasures and become his own."[923]

Such love

> "maketh the Lover infinitly Subject to [the] Person beloved, it maketh them both Supremely each others. We Lov him so much that we magnifie and Adore Him, and annihilate our selves and all our delights to be Delightful to Him. The Beloved of God is a God unto Him:"[924]

So far does Traherne's notion of unity go that in it not only are we 'raised', exalted almost to divinity, but God seems to be 'lowered' in a gesture of total self-abandon. "The Lover abandoneth Himselfe to the disposeall of his Beloved, is absolutely his Subject, and infinitly delighteth to be commanded by Him."[925] All of this self-abandon is written in the context of passionate love. When we are united to God, it is by love alone that we are so united.

> "All exterior works will I Performe to Please Thee: but by Delighting in thy Love will be united to Thee. Thy Lov to me Shall Dwell within me, Return againe, be Lov unto Thee, Transform my soul, and make us one. O my Father and the Bridgroom of my soul. All these are Treasures, and thy palace wonderfull, but thy Person is the Joy and Happines of my Soul,"[926]

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[922] *SM*.III.94.

[923] *SM*.III.93.

[924] *SM*.III.93.

[925] *SM*.III.93.

[926] *SM*.IV.39.

God's nature and person is love. The implication is that we may never be one with him until we are, not only improved by love, but made love as he is love. "Other Persons are

made amiable by Lov. Thy Person is Lov:"[927]

And so there seem to be two models of ultimate felicity. In communion God communicates himself to us and we offer back to him a world transformed. We live in a dynamic of continuing desire and satisfaction, of repeated gift and receipt, in communion with each other and with Him. In union we become one with him by love, following the model of the wife and husband, the lover and the beloved. Union and Communion — in the one we are lovers in the other we are friends[928]. In fact Traherne uses the two terms not inseparably and without contradiction -- together, singly, and separately[929]. In the same sentence we are called to both "be Amiable as Brides, Live in communion with Him as friends."[930] This coupling of the two together suggests that neither state is privileged above the other. Each speaks of a particular stage or place in the cycle of desire and felicity. It is an ever fuller participation in that cycle that is the real destination of the soul in Traherne.

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[927] *SM*.IV.39.

[928] Lest the implication be that being lover or wife is more intimate than being a friend, I should note that in *ITR*, Traherne calls marriage second to friendship in terms of the intimacy it requires.

[929] See, for example, "Next unto Retiremt, A Stable Reflection is required in ye Soul to dedicate it self to God, in an Individual union & communion with him,"(*ITR* 2v).

Ultimately communion, union, fruition, bliss are the oneness not of blurred boundaries or merged entities but the oneness of the circle:

> "our Act of Enjoying is that the End for which the World is made; & that by which we imitat God who rejoyceth in all his Works, live in Communion with him, and inherit all his Benefits, fulfilling all his Laws to wit the laws of Nature, & making ourselves Happy. Enjoying Him in them, & pleasing Him by Enjoying them. For the more we prize him the more we honor him; & the more we honor the more we Glorify him: the more we Glorify the more we Delight in him; & the more we delight in him the more we Enjoy him, & the more we enjoy him the more delightfull we are made unto him. Nay and the more we Enjoy him, the more we prize him. These things being one and compleat in a Circle."[931]

An earlier version read "These things being one & the circle compleat"; and Traherne's editorial change suggests that the circle is part of the perfection of the thing rather than a sign of its completion. Things are, in a circle, one and complete rather than one and so the circle is complete. It seems he wanted to make this distinction clear. The implication is that the circle continues. Indeed, its very continuance is part of its virtue since this circle is concerned with more than simple self-perpetuation. As Traherne's repetition of "the more" above makes clear, each action provokes another action of more intensity and fervour or of greater depth of delight. And so the circle might more appropriately be described as a kind of upwards spiral ever ascending into felicity.

On communion and the Cross

The perpetual motion of this circle relies on the force of love and desire. We are drawn by the force of some great thing. Initially we do not know what that is, but even after we do know the force to be love, the draw of that love does not diminish.

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[930] *SM*.IV.4. "Brides and Friends" are also coupled in *SM*.III.43.

[931] *SV* 28v-29r..

> "When I am lifted up saith the Son of Man I will draw all Men unto me…But by what Cords? The Cords of a Man, and the Cords of Lov"[932]

Writes Traherne. Traherne's discussion of the Cross is curiously limited to about ten meditations in the first *Century*[933], but the imagery he uses here of being drawn by cords is not. Elsewhere in his work we see also ligatures, bonds, cement, cords, sinews[934]. Always they speak of desire between the human soul and God. Here, the drawing of the Cross is magnetic; "As Eagles are Drawn by the Sent of a Carcais, As Children are Drawn together by the Sight of a Lion, As People flock to a Coronation, and as a Man is Drawn to his Beloved Object,"[935] so, says Traherne, are we drawn to the Cross.

> "If Lov be the Weight of the Soul, and its Object the Centre . All Eys and Hearts may convert and turn unto this Object : cleave unto this Centre, and by it enter into Rest."[936]

We are drawn to the bloody sufferings of Christ "our Eys must be towards it, our Hearts set upon it, our Affections Drawn, and our Thoughts and Minds united to it."[937] So the loadstone is the Rock of Ages[938].

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[932] *C*.I.56. Cf. *C*.I.57 where Traherne continues the image: "What Visible Chains or Cords draw these? What Invisible Links allure?"

[933] I use the term 'curiously' since most of his topics are revisted, revised and discussed across several genres and works. Why the cross is treated differently could make an interesting point of discussion, but it would be a departure from the purpose of this work and so I do not treat it here.

[934] Eg. "Wants are the Bands and Cements between God and us….Wants are the Ligatures between God and us. The Sinews that convey Sences from Him into us:" (*C*.I.5I).

[935] *C*.I.57.

[936] *C*.I.59.

[937] *C*.I.56.

[938] *C*.I.59 continues : "There [in the cross] we might see the Rock of Ages, and the Joys of Heaven.".

> "See how in all Closets, and in all Temples; in all Cities and in all feilds; in all Nations and in all generations they are lifting up their hands and Eys unto his Cross; and Delight in all their Adorations."[939]

What is it that draws them? Desire. "nothing compels Him [to look upon the cross], but... Commoditie and Desire."[940] In fact, the Cross is the centre of all desires. *C*.I.58 is dense and brief; the whole of it reads:

> "The Cross is the Abyss of Wonders, the Centre of Desires, the Schole of Virtues, the Hous of Wisdom, the Throne of Lov, the Theatre of Joys and the Place of Sorrows; It is the Root of Happiness, and the Gate of Heaven."

According to Traherne, the Cross is at once the most peculiar and the most exalted of all objects, an ensign, the only supreme and sovereign spectacle in all Worlds. In the Cross opposites unite in paradox. God's mercy and his anger, man's sin and infinite value go hand in hand. The hope and fear, misery and happiness of the human soul is there displayed. "There we may see a Man Loving all the World, and a GOD Dying for Mankind...An Innocent Malefactor,... There we may see the most Distant Things in Eternity united: all Mysteries at once couched together and Explained."[941]

Traherne moves from paradox to metaphor. "The Cross of Christ is Jacobs ladder". It is "a Tree set on fire with invisible flame, ... The Flame is Lov. The Lov in His Bosom

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[939] *C*.I.85.cf. "As on evry side of the Earth all Heavy things tend to the Centre; so all Nations ought on evry Side to flow in unto it." (*C*.I.56).

[940] *C*.I.57.

[941] *C*.I.59.

who died on it."[942] It is a throne of delights. Above all other objects of contemplation, it is "That Centre of Eternity, *That Tree of Life* in the midst of the Paradice of GOD!"[943]. "The centre of eternity" is a term used several times by Traherne to describe the Cross[944]. I think he means by it that the Cross is the Centre of all centres, the supreme centre that is beyond definition and can only be described by a layering of many images each of which touches but one part of the whole. 'The centre of eternity' suggests timelessness, or the superseding of temporal notions of time and space and places the Cross in infinity. Webber claims that "the Cross is made the symbol of communion, and therby negates time and space"[945]. I would suggest that it simply supersedes them, renders them aspects of a less relevant and less accurate vision, relics of partial illumination. As Webber rightly notes "Traherne uses the word 'centre' to apply to anything that can be said to have a core (as, for example, the earth), but he prefers it to mean something which can organize and shed light on what lies around it."[946] The Cross becomes the measure of all other things, all must be interpreted in relation to it.

The centrality of the Cross can be seen not just in the image of the Cross as the centre of eternity, but also as the Tree of Life. In the image of the Tree of Life, Traherne draws

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[942] *C*.I.60.

[943] *C*.I.55.

[944] *C*.I.54, *C*.I.55.See also "Atonement" (*COH* 81) in which "His Death is like a Centre that doth Spread / Over all worlds... Full of Lives".

[945] *TEI*, p.233.

[946] *TEI*, p.233

together the desire of the human, divine desire, and the Cross. The first *Century* begins with the desire of 'some great thing' and desire structures much of the first *Century*'s exploration of enjoyment[947]. Nearly half way through the first *Century* Traherne proclaims "*The Desire Satisfied is a Tree of Life.*". And God's desire is also that tree: "GOD was never without this Tree of Life"[948]. In this instance, desire is lifegiving because by it we learn our wants, because it "imports som thing absent", it makes our wants our treasures. And so the Tree of Life becomes a symbol of desire ever present and ever satisfied. Several meditations later, when the Cross becomes "that Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradice of GOD!"[949] we may come to see the fully vitalizing force of the Cross for Traherne. As Day attests, "the Cross is the most profound example of satisfied desire and the deepest expression of the 'Great thing' with which the *Century* began, the archetype by which we learn what we must know about loving all things properly."[950]

Webber also sees the vitality of the Cross. "The Cross is distinctly a vitalizing force, not the instrument of penitence that it had often been in earlier meditational writing."[951] This vitality of the Cross is where Traherne's imagery of the Cross most nearly approaches his

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[947] Day argues this structure persuasively. See *TT*, pp. 119-121.

[948] This and the preceding quotation both *C*.I.43.

[949] *C*.I.55.

[950] Day, *TT*. p.121.

[951] *TEI*, p.234.

concept of desire, for desire too is a vitalizing force. In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne writes of desire as a Spring of Motion.

> "The Soul when made, like a Watch wound up, is apt to go of it self; if the wheels be not entangled with grit and their teeth full of filth, the Spring that Commands them, will draw them about by a Gentle Threed, and direct the Hand to point out the Hours for a Day together, as if the Dead Workmanship were endued with understanding:... Appetite and Desire are the Spring that urge it, the Wheels are the Affections and powers of the Mind; Its Inclination is the Thred that draws them about... Being endued with Life, the Soul can feel the Absence, and the presence of all Objects. Being capable of Pleasure and Affected with its desire, it loves it self, and is ambitiously carried to all Enjoyments."[952]

That desire has a kind of mechanical quality is also suggested in the *Centuries* where, again, the figure of wheels set in motion by a spring is used to convey the vitalizing force of Desire:

> "Can all these things move so without a Life, or Spring of Motion? But the Wheels in Watches mov, and so doth the Hand that pointeth out the figures. This being a Motion of Dead things. Therfore hath GOD created Living ones: that by Lively Motions, and Sensible Desires, we might be Sensible of a Diety"[953]

The Cross is that "Centre of Desires" (I.58) from which this energy springs. Furthermore, desire is one of the effects the Cross has on its viewers. We have noted how people are drawn to the Cross. Traherne uses images of hunger and feeding, suggestive of the eucharist -- eagles drawn to a carcase, (I.56) the hungry to a feast (I.57) to describe the reaction the Cross invites. And this hunger is answered several meditations later when Traherne refers to Christ as "wholy fed upon by evry Christian." (I.86), those who are enabled "to digest the Nourishment" (I.87) of their souls. So the Cross is the centre of desires both in terms of its vitality and its attractiveness.

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[952] *KOG* 158v-159r.

[953] *C*.II.22.

Like desire, the Cross also burns. It is not only "*That Tree of Life* in the midst of the Paradice of GOD"(I.55), but also "a Tree set on fire" with the flame of Love (I.60). This flame is both passionate (love in the bosom of him who died) and illuminating (an invisible flame, that illuminateth all the world). And, though gruesome, it allures all who see it.

In *The Ceremonial Law* in which Traherne writes about Moses' call in the burning bush, the burning bush, though symbolic of the church rather than the Cross, is similarly illuminating and alluring. The burning bush is not the only thing that ravishes the sight by its brightness. God's Grace also shines brightly in every Age, but what ravishes Traherne about this grace is that it shines for him[954]. By grace all things relate to him, and are his as they are God's:

> "Who would expect that from the very first,
> Even from the Time the World for sin was curst,
> All things to one new born should so relate,
> And all the Ages be his own Estate?
> A Wide Possession! And a Joy Divine!
> That's wholy thine, O Lord, yet Wholy mine."[955]

The realisation of so great a grace should move the soul to a new intensity of love;

> "Oh how should this my Soul transform to Lov
> What flames, what fires, what Halelujahs mov!"[956]

And so, soul by soul, the whole church becomes alight with fire. The church is the burning bush, a thorny bramble converted by love, so that the barren bush bears "Even in

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[954] "Lord I am ravished the Grace to see,/ In evry Age so Brightly shine for me." (*TCL*, "Moses Call" ll.29-30).

[955] *TCL* "Moses Call" ll. 31-36.

[956] *TCL* "Moses Call" ll.41-42.

the midst of fire. What fruit? Her Tears."[957] As burning branches weep in a fire, so the church in tears confesses its enmity and begins to bear fruit:

> "And in this Heavenly Light she strangely bears
> All Kind of fruits, as well as Watery Tears.
> Which, while her peircing Thorns do prick her eys,
> Out of her Burning Lov to Thee Arise.
> Hope, Patience, Glory, Faith and Charity
> Within the Splendor of her flames we see
> And while in stranger fire she seems to burn
> She Joy conceivs, and Praises doth return."[958]

The fire "Calcines her only", her flames "aspire" to heaven and purify her so that, burning, she is a light alluring all the world just as the burning bush allured Moses to a vision of God. So Traherne concludes on both a personal and a corporate level:

> "And I O Lord pull off my shoes, and com
> With Reverence unto Thee, my shining Sun...
> Send me unto thy Church, and let her prov,
> To me and Thee, a burning Bush of Lov."[959]

Right through the poem the imagery is working at several levels. The bush burns as a sign to Moses, the bush burns as a sign for the poet, and it burns in its love for God. All of these burnings signal to each other. The sign to the individual becomes the sign to the whole church, and that same fire which is a sign is also the fire by which the church itself burns and is purified -- its barrenness turned into fruitfulness, its thorns the place of bounty. The fire that signalled the need for change becomes both the vehicle of that very transformation and the sign of love returned back to God. In all of this movement the flames work much as does desire. There is the initial calling to something greater or

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[957] *TCL* "Moses Call" l.46.

[958] *TCL* "Moses Call" ll. 61-68.

[959] *TCL* "Moses Call" ll. 75-76, 81-82.

higher, that striking difference between the fire and the empty land around it. There is a movement of aspiration towards heaven accompanied by a sense of distance from that heavenly end (that part of the poem in which the church confesses its enmity). There is purgation, purification, suffering, repentance followed by joy, fruitfulness, and transformation. The fire of purgation becomes, finally the fire of love and an expression of continued desire, "a burning Bush of Lov."

In *The Kingdom of God*, divine goodness is also seen as a fire: "His Infinit goodness being infinitly Ardent is infinitly Bright, because Infinitly Glorious. It is compared to Fire in the Holy Scripture"[960] writes Traherne. And in this passage he makes no distinction between divine goodness and divine love – the two are represented together in the image of fire. Traherne cites Moses and the bush, the descent of flames on Mount Sinai, Christ's baptising with fire in the descent of the Holy Spirit, the coal of fire pressed to the lips of Isaiah, Ezekiel's vision of Glory in the wheels of fire and Daniel's description of the throne of God as "like the Fiery Flames, and his Wheels as a Burning Fire."[961]. As in "Moses Call" in *The Ceremonial Law,* this firey love purifies[962]. This fire shares many of the qualities we have seen in Traherne's notion of desire -- it is "Activitie, vigor, Violence, Ardor, Impatience, Zeal, Irresistible Speed, Perfection,

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[960] *KOG* 183r.

[961] *KOG* 183v. In the margin Traherne notes: "Daniel 7.9.10.".

[962] "What Purifies the Rust of Idleness, or Death or consumes the Earthiness of a Dull estate, but the fire of Activitie, and Zealous Love." (*KOG* 183r).

Purity, Glory."[963] Traherne does not call this loving fire 'desire'[964], but like desire, it too is 'love in motion' "What is more glorious, then that which is most Active? Light and Fire!"[965]. This activity promptly leads Traherne back to his recurring theme of communication, for there is a need in divine goodness to be communicated. Divine goodness "loves to be delighted in."[966] And from simple communication he moves on to relationship, for divine goodness travels on a two way street; it not only affects, but is also affected by its recipients. "if it sees another dissatisfied with its own miscariage, it is confounded with Affliction,"[967]. Goodness is by its nature communicative. It is no surprise then that Traherne moves, in the subsequent folios of the manuscript, on from the fire of divine goodness and love and its need to be received, to our duty to communicate this goodness to others.

Similarly, Traherne's meditations on the Cross move from adoration and love received and given to the need to communicate this love to others. The Cross is not only a tree set

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[963] *KOG* 183v.

[964] In fact, in the list of what this fire is, cited above, 'Desire' was edited out of the manuscript. I take this not as an indication that desire is not relevant to his description of the fire of divine goodness and love, but that the treatment of it is deferred since he devotes several subsequent paragraphs to the desire of goodness to be communicated, its need to participate in the life of others, its inability to be full (ie. its lack) without this necessary communication. In other words, the fire is a quality of desire rather than desire being a quality of the fire.

[965] *KOG* 183v.

[966] *KOG* 183v.

[967] *KOG* 183v. Several folios later Traherne writes: " He is so deeply concerned in them, that he is persecuted [,]Imprisoned, Wounded, flouted and Killed in his servants[.]" (*KOG* 185r).

on fire and the centre of desires, but it is also a mirror of the truest reality. It not only shows us the life of Heaven, but the world too, in its true colours. "It is a Well of Life beneath in which we may see the face of Heaven abov: and the only Mirror, wherin all things appear in their Proper Colors"[968]. Furthermore, it shows us how to live in the world. The Cross is "the Schole of Virtues"[969].

> "Here you learn all Patience, Meekness, Self Denial, Courage, Prudence, Zeal, Lov, Charity, Contempt of the World, Joy, Penitence, Contrition, Modesty, Fidelity, Constancy Perseverance, Holiness, Contentation and Thanksgiving:"[970]

Lest his reader think the virtues learnt at the Cross are private virtues, Traherne ends the meditation with: "Here we learn to imitate Jesus in His love unto all." We receive God's love that we may give it. So strong is Traherne's desire to imitate Christ's love that he prays to apprehend this love with each of his five senses:

> "O that I could see it through all those Wounds! O that I could feel it it in those Stripes! O that I could hear it in all those Groans! O that I could Taste it beneath the Gall and Vinegre! O that I could smell the Savor of thy sweet Oyntments, even in this Golgotha or Place of a Skull."[971]

And this passionate plea is both preceded and concluded with the same theme.

> "O Thou who art most Glorious in Goodness, make me Abundant in this Goodness like unto Thee, That I may as Deeply pitty others Miserie, and as Ardently Thirst their Happiness as Thou doest."[972]

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[968] *C*.I.59. See "On Leaping over the Moon" in which heaven is in the puddle beneath the poet's feet

[969] *C*.I.58.

[970] *C*.I.61. That Traherne ends this list of virtues with thanksgiving is typical of his study of the virtues, a point to which I shall return in the final section of this thesis.

[971] *C*.I.63.

[972] *C*.I.63.

He writes. "I pray Thee teach me first Thy Lov unto Me, and then unto Man Kind!"[973] The whole purpose of his prayer is that by being so united he may be able also to imitate God's love to all persons. In this love, as in all else, divine gift is primary. Traherne wants to receive as fully as possible, be filled and overflow. This is his recurring theme. This is the cycle of desire looking outward: "for we must be Beloved, that we may lov. And lov, that we may be Glorious."[974]

On communion with one another

Both Webber and Stewart see self-love as the beginning of gift[975]. And Traherne's man must be filled before he can become a giver. 'That Pool must first be filled, that shall be made to overflow. He was ten yeers studying before he could satisfy his Self Lov. And now finds nothing more easy then to lov others better than oneself."[976] Self-love in God is

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[973] *C*.I.63.

[974] *KOG* 166v. "For all Pleasures will naturaly flow & overflow in the Soul, where once it enjoy with such Circumstances the pleasure of Loving & being Beloved." (*ITR* 10v).

[975] According to Stewart, "The cause and end of circulation is self-love: the universe emanates from divine narcissism."(*TEV*, p.193) Whereas for Webber, "self-love must be satisfied in itself before it can coincide with love of others....Self-love *becomes* love of others."(*TEI*, p 222).

[976] *C*.IV..55. On the overflowing of love from a satisfied heart see also *C*.IV.60. See also *CE* ch XXXII "To talk of overflowing in the disbursements and effusions of Love and goodness, till our emptiness and capacity be full within, is as impertinent and unseasonable, as to advise a Beggar to give away a Kingdom, or a dead man to breath,"... "Even Jacob's Ladder will not bring us to Heaven, unless we begin at the bottom. Self-love is the first round, and they that remove it, had as good take away all:" But Traherne is clear that self-love must not be divorced from the desire to love others: "We feel it [self-preservation] first, and must preserve our selves, that we may continue to enjoy other things: but at the bottom it is the love of other things that is the ground of this principle of Self-preservation. And if you divide the last from the first,it is the poorest Principle in the World." (*CE* p.259-261).

not selfish since "True Glory is to lov another for his own sake, and to prefer his Welfare and to seek His Happiness. Which God doth"[977]. "True Glory is the very Essence of his Being. Which is Lov unto His Beloved, Lov unto Himself, Lov unto His Creatures."[978] But "How can God be Lov unto Him self, without the Imputation of Self Lov?"[979] This is a question Traherne both raises and answers:

> "Did He lov Him self under any other Notion then as He is the Lover of his Beloved: there might be som Danger. But the reason why He loves Himself being becaus He is Lov: nothing is more Glorious than his Self Lov. ...His Lov unto Himself is his Lov unto them. And His Lov unto them is Lov unto Him self."[980]

Just as God's self-love increases rather than diminishes his love for us, so our self-love should overflow into love for others. "You must lov after his similitude."[981] Traherne reminds us. And the implication is that our interests should be so united to the interests of others that the two loves are indistinguishable. "Duties towards our selvs and Neighbors may be united. For Infinit Goodness hath made us one"[982].

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[977] *C*.IV.64.

[978] *C*.IV.64.

[979] *C*.IV.65.

[980] *C*.IV.65.

[981] *C*.IV.65.

[982] *KOG* 184v.

That God's interest and ours are one is the basis of all community in Traherne. Warning against limiting infinite goodness, Traherne writes:

> "They are highly Mistaken that think it dangerous for Goodness to be Infinit. Some there are that like pusillanimous niggards (who think they shall be undone by Liberalitie) fear least God also should over Act himself in Bounty....When Men once pin their base and penurious excuses upon God's shoulders, and think him such an one as themselves, their horrid maximes and covetous Providences may pass then for good Divinitie,...It is a trick that Satan taught them, but God was never acquainted with it, to divide his own Interest from that of others."

Traherne continues, "His Interest is most promoted in that of his Creatures, and only in theirs it is secured."[983]. This is partly how Traherne surmounts the question of community versus unity. With God as with each other, we are "individually one", not merged, and yet united.

> "They are individualy one . which it is very Amiable and Beautifull to Behold. Becaus therin the Simplicity of God doth evidently appear. The more He loveth them, the Greater he is and the more Glorioius. The more He loveth them, the more precious and Dear they are to Him. The more he loveth them, the more Joys and Treasures He possesseth. The more He loveth them the more he Delighteth in their Felicity. The more he loveth them the more he delighteth in himself for being their felicity. The more He loveth them, the more he rejoiceth in all his Works for serving them: and in all his Kingdom for Delighting them. And being Lov to them the more he loveth Himself and the more jealous he is least himself should be Displeased, the more he loveth them and tendereth them and secureth their Welfare. And the more he desires his own Glory the more Good He doth for them, in the more Divine and genuine maner."

This he concludes with the challenging admonition: "You must lov after his similitude."[984] We are tied in bonds of unity and community, and Traherne reminds us

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[983] *KOG* 180v-181r.

[984] This and the previous quotation are from *C*.IV.65. Again Traherne's repetition of "the more" indicates the perpetually intensifying nature of this love. He has used the same structure for the same purpose in *SV* 28v-29r.

that what we do to each other we do to God. Traherne asserts, in fact that to hurt a brother is to hurt God himself:

> "Verily in as much as ye did it to the least of my Brethren saith our Savior, ye did it unto me.
> Saul, Saul.Why persecutest thou me?
> A Christian is not only his, but He!
> He that toucheth you, toucheth the Apple of mine eye."[985]

Conversely, when we love our neighbour, we love God. In fact, loving our neighbour is the best way to do so:

> "CHARITY to our Neighbour is Love expressed towards GOD in the Best of his Creatures. We are to Love GOD in all the Works of his Hands, but in those especially, that are most near unto him, chiefly those in which he manifesteth himself most clearly, and these are they that are most like him, most exalted by him, most loved of him, and most delightful to him."[986]

That this love to our neighbours also benefits us mirrors the fact that love to God is also love to ourselves just as his love to himself is also love to his creatures. The good of one is not divorced from the good of the other. In living in communion with God and one's neighbour, one is at once going out of oneself and coming home, at once acting freely and nobly and answering a deep seated need. As Nesca Robb writes: "Man's love is a spontaneous act which he is free to make or not as he wills, yet at the same time a response to something that is at once the utmost goal of his desire and a presence at the root of his being deeper than all conscious life."[987]

Love is wisdom. Our self is enriched in giving, writes Traherne, and satisfied in the happiness of God, men and angels:

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[985] *KOG* 185r. Here Traherne fuses scripture and poetry in a seamless whole moving out of one into the other and back again without differentiation.

[986] *CE* p.144.

[987] Nesca Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, London: Unwin, p.69.

> "As Lov is his wisdom, whose Essence is Lov: so it is ours. Our Holiness Blessedness and Glory. for by it we become the End of all, of which God is the Author. are Glorified our Selves and Enrich others. Enjoy the Treasures which we Giv a way. Satisfie our Selves and Exalt others, knit all the happienes of God Angels and Men in one. Enrich our Selves by Giving a way our Treasures, posess all in Such a manner as to be the Joy of all. Be Like God by Lov a Lone."[988]

It is only in this sense that the joys of others may be our joys. It is in the light of love that we may see all creatures as servants of our happiness as we are of theirs. It is not until every man is a treasure to us that we may be co-enjoyers of their joys and co-possessors of their delights.

> "But that all this should be done for me, that they all might be Lovers in Eternal Glory, every man a God unto my soul, or Like a God, a Living Treasure, a friend, a joy, an Immortal Lover, this maketh all His Thrones and Temples mine: as it doth alsoe that they are spectators of my Glory.... Lov a Lone maketh me the possessor of all their joys, lov alone maketh me a Joy and a Delight to them."[989]

This is what it means to live in communion. Traherne's communion is not about living in agreement; it is not a companionable co-existence, but a profound exchange of needs and sufficiencies, a kind of essential co-reliance in which wholeness cannot be found in oneself alone, but only through mutual generosity.

Traherne admits that this is difficult:

> "I confess there are many Disguises, that overcast the Face of Nature with a vail, and cloud these Sovereign Creatures [angels and men]: the Excellency, the Absence, and Distance, and unknown Nature of Angels; the Perversness of Nature, the Ignorance, and Unkindness, and Disorders of Men Darken, and Eclipse this Glorious Duty, and make it [loving our neighbour] uncouth and difficult to us: But all these Disorders came in by Sin"[990]

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[988] *SM*.II.65.

[989] *SM*.II.83. "For Two persons to love each other in all this Grandure, clothed with the Heavens... is to Liv towards each in Glory." (*SM*.II.96).

[990] *CE* p.145.

But, "In the Purity of Nature, Men are Amiable Creatures and prone to Love,"[991]. We must look with the eyes of Eden. "There was no Possitive Law in *Eden*, that required a Man to Love his Neighbour, it was a Law of Nature."[992] Traherne continues the analogy: Adam did not love Eve out of compulsion but because "His Appetite and Reason were united together, and both invited him to lose himself in her Embraces;"[993]. Traherne calls this appetite and reason together "a silent Law" which we too may follow. The story of Eve is a model (p 146) and we, in apprehending the command of God to love our neighbours, "must not regard the Malevolence of Men, but look upon the pure Intention of the Law; and the success that would have followed, had it been, as it might have been, perfectly observed."[994] We are given the chance to be the new Adam and new Eve and to act in obedience to the law of love. And so Traherne's invitation to communion with our neighbour is not only an invitation to personal fulfillment but also to participation in a larger scheme of redemption. We are to break the cycle of disobedience and division opening up a whole world of possibility.

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[991] *CE* p.145.

[992] *CE* p.144-145.

[993] Ibid.

[994] Ibid.

Traherne writes that love is "at once a freedom from all law, and the severest law in the World, but a willing and delightfull law of the most constraining, and Indispensable Necessitie."[995] Traherne constantly reminds his reader of the importance of freedom:

> "No action can be Delightful that is not our Pleasure in the Doing....Willingness in its operation is the Beauty of the Soul, and its Honour founded in the freedom of its Desire. Whatsoever it does not desire and delight in, tho the matter of the performance be never so excellent, the Manner is spoiled, and totally Blasted."[996]

But that freedom is most expeditiously exercised in prescribed ways. The law of love which is so severe and total, is also irresistible: Traherne cries of divine love: "O sweet and eternal Violence! O healing fire, O Lawfull and Irresistible Charm! To be a slave Unto thee is perfect freedom. ... O make me a happy Captive, and lead me captiv allwayes!"[997].

The aim is to be so united to Love that our interests and the interests of love are one. Then the Law of love becomes a delight and a joy. Were love in the creature to correspond with divine love "There would be so Divine a Sympathie between GOD, and the Soul, that it would read all its own Desires in his Bosom, all its own Joys in his Desires,"[998]. This is the fullness of felicity --- to delight and desire with God. In this felicity, one's own happiness is the happiness of others and the glory of God, for God has

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[995] *KOG* 186v.

[996] *CE* p.149. "without this Liberty there can be no Love, since Love is an active and free affection; that must spring from the Desire and pleasure of the Soul." Traherne continues. Cf. the discussion of freedom in ch.4 of this thesis.

[997] *KOG* 187r-187v.

[998] *KOG* 187r. Cf. "For He is to Dwell in us, and We in Him, becaus He liveth in our Knowledg and we in His. His Will is to be in our Will, and our Will is to be in His Will" (*C*.IV.72).

so extended himself towards us that he has made the happiness of his creatures his own highest desire. "He infinitely desires" Traherne reminds us. Traherne's God desires glory and human goodness[999], the happiness of his creatures and their love. All of these are one desire "Which is Lov unto His Beloved, Lov unto Himself, Lov unto His Creatures."[1000] "Love teacheth more in one day then Books can in a thousand years."[1001] We learn to love God by loving men. By love we live in them and live in God:

> "Did you lov others as you lov your elf, you would be as much affected with their Joys. Did you lov them more, more . for according to the Measure of your Lov to others will you be Happy in them . for according therto you will be Delightfull to them, and Delighted in your felicity. The more you lov men, the more Deligthfull you will be to God, and the more Delight you will take in God, and the more you will enjoy Him. So that the more like you are to Him in Goodness, the more abundantly you will enjoy his Goodness. By loving others you liv in others to receive it."[1002]

All of this is true of love, it teaches, unites, makes us possessors of each other's happiness. But the value of love is more than relational. There is an intrinsic worth to love, love for love's sake:

> "All security and Power are in Lov:...yet all these rea[c]h not the Inward parts and Depths of love. There is something beside for which these are valued. Namely the sweetnes of naked Love, and unexp[r]essible sweetness and Intrinsick Joy and pleasure which we feel in Naked

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[999] Human goodness is so like God's, that nothing can be more like it than it is. "And yet that it is Distinct from his, is manifest becaus it is the Return or Recompense of it. The only thing which for and abov all Worlds he infinitly Desires." (*C*.IV.85).

[1000] *C*.IV.64. the context is: "GOD doth desire Glory as his Soveraign End, but True Glory. From whence it followeth that he doth soveraignly and supremely desire both his own Glory and Mans Happiness. ... for True Glory is to lov another for his own sake, and to prefer his Welfare and to seek His Happiness...So that he seeks the Happiness of Angels and Men as his Last End, and in that is his Glory... Which is Lov unto His beloved, Lov unto Himself, Lov unto His Creatures."

[1001] *KOG* 187r.

[1002] *C*.IV.57.

> Lov. Which God doth So strongly covett and Delight in, that for the sake of it He created the world and all."[1003]

This 'naked love' is the desire and delight behind all of creation, Traherne asserts, and it is the foundation of life in communion. "Naked Lov is the cause of all things, and naked Lov is the End of all Things. ...Till therefore we see the Inward Blessednes of being Beloved we can never Enjoy the Palaces and Temples of those that are to Lov us: nor God who hath made them to Lov us,"[1004] Could we see Love itself, we should see God."could I see Lov in its Naked Essence I should see thy Glory. For God is Love, which is the sweetest Being."[1005]

"It remaineth therfore that I retire into God." Writes Traherne, "And lov all Mankind in Him, after His Similitude. That is, evry person in the whole World, with as near & violent affection, as I would my Wife, or my Dearest Friend:"[1006] Our employment is both to "Lov to be Beloved" and "To Lov and to be Beloved.". Until we can see this felicity is "a Broken Circle."[1007]

[1003] *SM*.II.86.

[1004] *SM*.II.84.

[1005] *SM*.II.86.

[1006] *ITR* 10r

[1007] This and the preceding two quotes are from *SM*.II.87.

Desire and satisfaction in the circle of bliss

To love and be beloved is the circle of felicity -- desire and delight feeding and filling each other in the love of the creature and of the creator. In all of this, satisfaction is always implied: The ways of God "Prevent, fulfill, exceed my whole Desire,"[1008] Traherne writes in *The Ceremonial Law*. And in this simple statement we see the pattern of desire as a whole – Desire goes before, is the means and overflows. Desire informs the sight; "For Want preceding makes us cleerly see/Both End and Fountain of Felicitie."[1009] Desire is also the engine and the path we travel into emptiness and nothing, in order to find fulness and everything, into lack and need to find satisfaction and plenty. And in the process of desiring, Traherne suggests, we find heaven within whilst looking for it without:

> "Lets sojourn in the Desert Wilderness
> Of long and uncreated nothing, guess
> What may the Dismall Chaos be, and view
> The vacant Ages, while he nought did doe.
> Those Empty Barren Spaces will appear
> At last as if they all at once were here
> The Silence Darkness and Deformitie
> In which we nothing plainly nothing see
> Will make the Univers enlightning them
> Even like unto the new Jerusalem.
> And while we wisely seek for Heaven there,
> Twill clearly make us find our Heaven here."[1010]

[1008] *TCL*, "The Introduction" l.26.

[1009] *TCL*, "[Manna]II", ll.23-24. That want lends urgency to desire is also suggested in Traherne's line "The Want that pincheth most is Answerd first." (*TCL*, Elim, l.98).

[1010] *TCL*, "[Manna]II", 69-80. See also "Ambition" (*COH* 47) in which delight "maketh Heaven & Earth a Paradice.. Thine inward Man/ … even here may live and reign abov."

What matters is our hunger. To the hungry, all is manna[1011]; to the one who prizes all is treasure. Want is the fountain of felicity.

Just as delight and desire are the two faces of love, so possession and want are two faces of God's fullness. Both are held simultaneously, distinctly and eternally. In "The Anticipation" Traherne writes of God:

> "He's not like us: Possession doth not Cloy,
> Nor Sence of Want Destroy.
> Both always are together:
> No force can either from the other Sever.
> Yet theres a Space between
> Thats Endless. Both are seen
> Distinctly still, and both are seen for ever."[1012]

He is like us, in as much as he is the mirror in which we may see how the coexistence of desire and delight function, desire lending greater intensity to delight, delight feeding the next desire (stanzas 7-8). And yet he is not like us. We

> "ought to have a Sence
> Of all our Wants, of all His Excellence,
> That while we all, we Him might comprehend."[1013]

He is the fountain and end; he is also the means. And his desiring in which he both has and wants, with neither cloying nor ceasing, is to be the model we follow. God desires infinitely; and what he desires is desire itself[1014]. This is why desire in Traherne is not

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[1011] "All will be manna to the Hungry Soul,/ Or Living Waters in a Chrystal Bowl." *TCL*, "[Manna] II", ll. 87-88.

[1012] "The Anticipation" ll. 82-87.

[1013] "The Anticipation" ll.124-126.

[1014] It was not so much the performance of Solomon as the passionate purpose of David that pleased God, writes Traherne : "Infinite desires and intentions of Pleasing him are real objects to his Eye....His desire is, that the Soul would... delight in him freely," (*CE* p.252-253).

something temporary. It is not a transitional state we pass through on the way to final fullness, but a site we revisit again and again in the continuing cycle of want and satisfaction. Final fullness *is* this interplay of want and satisfaction, heaven here and hereafter, having and wanting from and into eternity.

In the *Centuries* Traherne writes of there being no want in heaven:

> "Here upon Earth, it [love] is under many Disadvantages, and Impediments that maim it in its Exercise. But in Heaven it is most Glorious.....There it appeareth in all its Advantages, for evry Soul being full and fully satisfied, at Eas, in rest, and Wanting nothing, easily overflows and shines upon all."[1015]

This text is predicated on an uncharacteristic division between this life and the next. Throughout the meditation, "Here upon Earth", is opposed to "But in Heaven", whereas is most of his writing, heaven is a continuation of felicity on earth, felicity is both here and hereafter[1016]. Towards the end of the meditation it becomes clear why Traherne has used this division. He is writing about the specific power of love under trial, and the Estate of Trial, though it may be where felicity is learned, though it may make us fit to be the bride, does not continue in Heaven. "remember that this and the other life are made of a Piece: but this is the time of Trial, that of Rewards." he writes[1017]. The reason he here emphasises the satisfaction, ease and rest of heaven is so that we might appreciate the high value of love shown without these advantages. Those who are "Wanting nothing" may love easily, whereas those who love in the midst of want show love "in this world

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[1015] *C*.IV.60.

[1016] Cf. *C*. I.46-48; *SM* IV.27. However in *TCL* "Adam's Fall" l.4 Heaven is 'where Nothing is Desired'. Adam's fall is described in images of distance, and heaven and earth are opposed in order that the greatness of the gift of redemption might be appreciated.

[1017] *C*.IV.60.

the more Glorious" because it exerts itself "in the midst of these Disadvantages"[1018]. The point of the meditation is not so much to describe the nature of desire in the afterlife as it is to make plain that "The Greatest Disadvantages of Lov are its Highest Advantages . in the Greatest Hazzards it atchieveth to it self the Greatest Glory."[1019].

Far greater in number and force are Traherne's statements which portray desire as eternal. Not only is desire a divine attribute, thereby making it eternal, but its function as a purveyor of treasure and as an enhancer of delight is an ongoing function. Were there no desire there would be no treasure, and were there no treasure heaven would not be heaven. Eternal delight is not a static state, but a 'succession of delights'. God's perfection is "a Propertie that propagates infinit Numbers, and Successions of Delight and naturaly proceeds to Measures Illimited, and everlasting."[1020] is what Traherne claims. And desire fulfilled begets more desire.

> "as there is a κυκλογένεσιȿor Circular Generation in Ice and Water,... So is there a perpetual and Eternal Reciprocation here: For as Water begets Ice, and Ice begets Water; the perfection we receiv from God makes us to admire, and Love his perfection, and the Love of his perfection increases ours; and the more our perfection is increased, the more we admire his, and the more we admire it, the more perfect we are. Which manifestly tends to an Illimited Growth of Happiness and Pleasure"[1021]

[1018] *C*.IV.60.

[1019] *C*.IV.60.

[1020] *KOG* 196v.

[1021] *KOG* 196v.

This 'circular generation' is like the "circular progress" of "Seed from Trees, & Trees from Seed" in the *Commonplace Book*[1022], in which also desire is self-perpetuating.

In his *Commonplace Book* entry on Desire, Traherne notes that love and knowledge are implanted in the soul as seeds. Our desire for knowledge or true happiness draws us so that the soul "ayms or levells at som particular objects" at first guided by sense rather than choice. The first thing the soul apprehends is "its own Attractions or impulsions" eventually moving on to "the exercise of its own Acts or choyce... now using sense as a servant, which before did lead it as a guide"[1023]. Desire is not taught. The origins of desire are with us from birth, and the knowledge that feeds it comes from without. Even the best teacher is but a midwife.

> "As food received by the mother doth only nourish, not give life to the fruit conceived in her womb, so the most pregnant suggestions of some, do only feed, not beget the informall desire of knowledge or happiness. The best Instruction or precepts of tutors, of parents, or the experimts we get ourselves are but as so many offices, or Rules of midwivrie, for bringing forth what was before conceivd."[1024]

Knowledge is love restored, desire focussed on its proper object. "So that knowledge properly is but our naturall desire, or implanted blind lov restored to sight:"[1025] But more to the point, the more we come to know, the more we continue to desire : "And nature doth as it were first grope after that which at length she comes to see, and having seen

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[1022] *CB*.folio 35, col.1.

[1023] *CB* folio 35, col.1.

[1024] *CB* folio 35, col.1.

[1025] *CB* folio 35, col.1

desires to embrace or kisse."[1026] So the soul progresses in ever enlarging circles of desire which multiply into infinity:

> "As there is a circular progress of Seed from Trees, & Trees from Seed: so is there a reciprocall production of desire or lov in one & the same man: for mens Actions of this kind are immanent and multiply within himself."[1027]

Ultimately Felicity and the circle of desire are the same thing. In *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne describes the circle of felicity as precisely this circle of desire in which desire is magnified and multiplied infinitely into all eternity. In this circle the human soul is the end of all, the sole object, the bride, the sovereign, able to love because she is loved, participating in a dynamic which never ends because it is in itself the motion of love. Composed of both delight and desire, this love is both ever satisfied and never satisfied, so that "neither is there stop nor stay". The soul and God are both jealous always of love and love again, impatient of delay, violently transported by love and reduced to a desperate state at any perceived mitigation of that love. God's fervour is as severe as ours, Traherne asserts. In fact the very jealousy of human love may serve as a picture of divine love:

> "If it be lawfull to Compare Cottages with Towers, and little Villages to Imperial Cities, full of Temples and Palaces; we may transfer this [the account of a jealous husband] in a figure, to God and the Soul. And indeed to this Intent was the place in Solomons Song first uttered. It being a Song of Loves between Christ and his Church. For her Affection and his are Equaly Compared to Perfumes and Spices of such Orient Sweetness, and fragrant Smell, that neither of them can ever be satisfyed with Loves. The more he Loves, the more he Desireth her Affection: The more she Loves, the more she desireth his. The more he Loves, the more Lovely he is. And the more she Loves him, her lips drop as an Honey Comb the more Honey and Milk are under her Tongue, and the further allways their Lov's proceed, they are Still the Sweeter; So that neither there is Stop, nor Stay, till the Measure be Infinit; the deeper the Sweeter, the last, and Highest Degree, being the Crown of all. By how much the more

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[1026] *CB* folio 35, col.1

[1027] *CB* folio 35, col.1

> Excellent and dearly beloved, by so much the more precious and Esteemed. By how much the more Esteemed--, by so much the more Jealous is the Soul that Esteems, at least the more desirous of Lov again:."[1028].

This is felicity. In this circle of desire does the sphere of felicity consist. In the end felicity is not so much a destination as it is a process or a way of life.

> "And of This Circle does the Sphere of felicite consist. This is the Circuit of Heaven against which there is no Inchantment; this the communion between God and us, this the cause, and the end of all."[1029]

Traherne concludes his discussion of desire in this final statement, eloquent and simple. As a piece of prose it is masterful. He begins with lofty metaphor and more complex grammatic constructions. With each of the three regular rhythmic repetitions "this is…", the statement simplifies itself so that by the time he reaches his final phrase, there is no adornment at all. The final phrase is a simple statement composed of single syllable words. The circular imagery– circle, sphere and circuit -- consistent with itself and with what he has written elsewhere, reminds us of the other cycles in his work: innocence/fall/redemption, or sight/custom/sight regained. "Circuit of Heaven" and "Inchantment" following so soon after the circle and sphere, allude to the hermetic circle, so ubiquitous in his work, whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. The whole statement both refers back to his central theme of felicity and directs his reader to the ultimate goal of his faith (communion with God) whilst employing familiar scholastic terms (cause and end) themselves laden with meanings. In the end, less is more. The whole thing acts as a funnel expansive at the top, condensed at the bottom, or as a lasso,

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[1028] *KOG* 166r-166v.

[1029] *KOG* 166v-167r.

circling round in the air before finally tightening in to the clinch. The cycle of desire is the circle of bliss.

Gratitude:

A perpetual cycle of desire may sound to some not so dissimilar to the misery of those who live in a state of desiring yet never possessing[1030] and so it is necessary to conclude with a brief consideration of gratitude. True Desire in Traherne is always intended for satisfaction; and gratitude is intended as a counter-weight to insatiability. Just as Hope is a virtue of Belief and Desire[1031], so Gratitude is a virtue of Satisfaction and Praise. Desire without satisfaction is despair; desire satisfied without gratitude is despicable. And so Traherne may well assert that Insatiability is good but that Ingratitude is bad[1032]. Ingratitude is bad for several reasons; it kicks against heaven, it is unbecoming, but more importantly, it is a kind of blindness that cannot see its treasures:

> "Two things there are, that make the kingdom of Heaven Desolate upon Earth. The one is the Blindness of those Profane ones that cannot See celestial Joys, the other is the Ingratitude of those Holy ones that kick at Heavenly Treasures."[1033]

Understanding the worth of a thing is not just about feeling its usefulness to oneself but also of appreciating its place and purpose in eternity. In failing to prize rightly, ingratitude fails to be righteous. True gratitude relies on right sight, on right esteem or

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[1030] See, for instance, *C*.I.48,49.

[1031] *CE*.p.117. Cf. p 132 "Hope".

[1032] See *C*.I.21-22; III.59.

[1033] *SM*.III.23. the latter "Sel that in the time of Abundance which in the Day of Distress Martyrs would have bought with their Deerest Blood."

prizing rightly, and so is connected with the whole notion of righteousness as established in chapter three of this thesis. Gratitude is a choice, as the existence of its opposite Ingratitude implies, and as such it is exercised in that sphere of power and act inhabited by the human soul as set out above in chapter four. 'Base', 'odious' and 'abominable' are some of the adjectives Traherne uses to describe Ingratitude[1034], whereas Gratitude is a thing of beauty. And this beauty is not just a reflection of the greatness of the gift, though there is a correlation in Traherne between magnitude of gift and degree of thanks[1035]. Gratitude has its own beauty distinct from the goodness of the received benefit to which it refers. There is "a certain beauty in the act of Gratitude, distinct from the goodness of the Benefit, that is so naturally sweet to the goodness of the Soul, that it is better to die than renounce it"[1036] Traherne asserts with such force that it is clear that gratitude is more than an adjunct to the gift received, a kind of afterthought or reflex. And yet it is a response and as such is always reliant upon the act that precedes it. Gratitude cannot exist outside the process of gift and receipt of which it is a part, and so it has its place in the whole dynamic of communication and communion set out in the earlier part of this chapter, chapter five. "One of the greatest ornaments of this *Vertue*, is the *Grateful Sence* of Benefits received:... All Gifts are but *Carkasses* devoid of Life,

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[1034] *CE* p.272.

[1035] See *CE* p.272-273.

[1036] *CE* p.272. See also: "All acts of Gratitude have a great deal of sweetness in their own nature," (*CE* p.273).

unless inspired with that *Sence*, which maketh them *Delightful*."[1037] One may be surrounded by causes of delight but not be blessed unless one is full of joy and gratitude. Gratitude is that which makes the gift a treasure, and perhaps this is so because gratitude is a kind of acknowledgement of previous need.

Gratitude is that poise of the soul that is aware both of its need and of its satisfaction. In gratitude the soul is retrospective and present at once, aware that it has needed, is full, and will need again. In fact, the cycle of desire in which we want, have and overflow, is the foundation of gratitude according to Traherne.

> "when that want is satisfied and removed, another appeareth, of which before we were not aware. Till we are satisfied we are so clamorous and greedy, as if there were no pleasure but in receiving all: When we have it we are so full, that we know not what to do with it, we are in danger of bursting, till we can communicate all to some fit and amiable Recipient, and more delight in the Communication that we did in the Reception. This is the foundation of real Gratitude."[1038]

Gratitude issues forth as contentment, and praise and thanksgiving:

> "In the utmost height of our Satisfaction there is such an infinite and eternal *force*, that our Gratitude breaks out in exulting and triumphing Effusions; all our Capacities, Inclinations, and Desires being fully satisfied, we have nothing else to do, but to Love and be Grateful."[1039]

Note that Gratitude happens "In the utmost height of our Satisfaction"[1040]. Traherne is not speaking here only of the satisfaction of a particular desire, but of the larger promise that all our capacities, inclinations and desires will find their eventual and continuing satisfactions. So sure is he of this abundant satisfaction that he writes of it as a thing

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[1037] *CE* p.269-270.

[1038] *CE* p.258.

[1039] *CE* p.273. see also p.275.

[1040] *CE* p.273.

already achieved. Here satisfaction is neither a passive state, nor an end of story, but a condition of "infinite and eternal *force*" of exhultation and effusion. We can do nothing but love and be grateful. Our sense at that point is "to receive no more, but overflow for ever."[1041] This is where we want to remain, at the point of overflowing. In fact gratitude is so full and so filling that we want to *become* all gratitude. As Traherne describes it, "Pure Gratitude is so divine a thing, that the Soul may safely wish to be turned *all* into Gratitude."[1042] And what kind of state would this be? Certainly not a quiet or a passive one. Traherne writes of the grateful soul that "The pleasure of Loving is its only business; it is turned all into flame, and brightness, and transportation, and excess. It infinitely passes Light and Fire in quickness and motion: all Impediments are devoured, and GOD alone is its Life and Glory."[1043]

One of the clearest expressions of this gratitude is found in a life turned towards virtue. Traherne asserts "That all the business of Religion on GODS part is Bounty, Gratitude on ours, and that this Gratitude is the sphere of all Vertue and Felicity, easily is discerned after the first intimation."[1044] All religion is about gratitude. Not only are all praises, extasies, adorations and offerings the feathers and wings of angelic gratitude[1045], but the

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[1041] *CE* p.273-274.

[1042] *CE* p. 275-276.

[1043] *CE* p.274.

[1044] *CE* p.284.

[1045] Gratitude is a seraphim and all of our praises are "but the Feathers and the Wings of that Seraphim in Glory." (*CE* p.284).

virtues of repentance, obedience, hope, patience, courage – any desire to please – is "but Gratitude in several dresses, as Time, Place, and Occasion require."[1046] The public forms of religion are all about gratitude too. "Sermons are to inform and assist our Gratitude, Sacraments to revive and exercise its vertue."[1047]

Day writes of a "rhetoric of gratitude"[1048] and gratitude is not simply a virtue but a way of seeing, a way of life. We are to see clearly what we have been given (*CE* p. 276), not praising God only for our health, food and raiment, but for all the bounty and causes of joy that we find in the whole creation, angels and men. In so doing the soul is enlarged and participates in the dynamic of gift, receipt and return that marks the Christian life. One can only be grateful in as much as one is aware of the greatness of the gift that has been received. But the point of all this is the soul's expansion towards the divine. "The clothing of the soul with the habit of Gratitude is identical with the soul's union with God"[1049] writes Day. Gratitude is the soul fed by knowledge extending itself in love towards its benefactor. And so it is a position, a poise of the soul, an attitude or way of life as well as being a virtue.

That is not to say that gratitude is a speculative or meditative virtue. Gratitude may be an attitude of life, a poise of the soul, but its direction is towards action. True thankfulness,

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[1046] *CE* p.284.

[1047] *CE* p.284.

[1048] *TT*. p.41.

[1049] *TT* p.36.

like true holiness, must be thankfulness of life and the thankful life issues its most eloquent praises in its actions[1050]. Over and over again in the *Thanksgivings*, his plea is for an active life, a life that is useful to others[1051]. "Throughout the *Thanksgivings* the reader is assailed less with an image of the beautious world," McFarland reminds us, "than with an onslaught of verbs and verbals:

...praising...silencing...flight...demolishing'

'...transforming...exalting...concerning...reaching,'

'...begetting...propagating...enlivening... cherishing ...preserving.' Until finally, in the 'Thanksgiving and Prayer for the NATION,' we are reminded that the world is 'A Theatre for Actions,' and it is into that great epoch of activity, bustle, and ado that this work leads us"[1052]

In his final *Thanksgiving*, "Thanksgiving and Prayer for the NATION", Traherne asks God to make him a leader in the "Theatre of Actions".

Make me a Moses
Nehemiah,
Ezra, David to thee & them. [1053]

In the *Centuries* Traherne repeatedly identifies himself with David[1054]. Here he continues the image and expands it:

[1050] "Thus ought we to the Best of our Power to express our Gratitud and friendship to so great a Benefactor in all the Effects of Lov and fidelity. Doing his pleasure with all our Might, and promoting his Honor with all our Power." (*C*.III.93).

[1051] See for instance, *Thanksgivings*, p.285, p.267, p.236.p.284.

[1052] McFarland, "Thomas Traherne's *Thanksgivings*...", p.14.

[1053] *Thanksgivings*, p.321.

> "As Moses did the Israelites, David his Jews; Jesus Sinners:
> Give me wide and publick Affections;
> So strong to each as if I loved him alone.
> Make me a Blessing to all the Kingdom,
> A peculiar Treasure (after thy similitude) to every Soul."[1055]

As McFarland points out in "Thomas Traherne's *Thanksgivings*...", in this *Thanksgiving*, Traherne's words comprise a social ethic of gratitude in action such as is not uncommon amongst devotional writing of the age. That Thanksgiving should be transcribed as action is also found in, for example, Bishop Reynolds who, in his "General Thanksgiving" added to the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1661, includes a supplication for the ability to "show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives.". For Richard Baxter (*Christian Directory*, 1673) words alone are not enough to express thanks. He writes: "Let Thankfulness to God thy Creator, Redeemer and Regenerator, be the very temperament of thy soul, and faithfully expressed by thy Tongue and Life." John Arrowsmith makes the connection between gratitude and action even clearer when he asserts: "He is the most thankful that is the most fruitfull Christian. There must be *Gratiarum actio* a doing of thanks."[1056] This 'doing of thanks' is exactly what Traherne is suggesting. As McFarland concludes, Traherne's view of thanksgiving "is clearly within this tradition of gratitude in action."[1057]

[1054] A substantial part of the third *Century* (*C*.III.70-96) concerns Traherne's exploration of the psalms and his particular identification with David is hinted in meditation 70. In *Thanksgivings for the Body*, too, he cries "O that I were as *David*, the sweet Singer of *Israel*!" (I.341).

[1055] *Thanksgivings*, p.330.

[1056] From a sermon preached before Parliament quoted in McFarland, "*Thanksgivings*..." p14.

[1057] McFarland, p14.

This *Gratiarum actio*, doing of thanks or thanks in action could provide the subject of a whole other study of Traherne, so serious and hitherto largely under-estimated is Traherne's notion of gratitude[1058]. The *Thanksgivings* themselves have received relatively little attention. Stewart calls the collection "a marvelous little work"[1059]; Fisch claims they are in places, "little more than a pastiche of Psalm-poetry,"[1060]. Day devotes a chapter to them in *Thomas Traherne*, in which he notes, with Sauls, the roots of Puente in the *Thanksgivings*, their structure and, most insightfully, that they are a kind of laboratory of style, a "workshop' in which Traherne was forging" the most characteristic devices of his style[1061]. Their similarity to Andrewes' *Preces Privatae* is clear, as is their relation to the Psalms, but no work has been done on their similarity to his other Psalmic resolves in *Inducements to Retiredness* and *The Kingdom of God*. In their bracketing style the *Thanksgivings* intimate the simultaneity of all things, Traherne's vision of all things existing in what Day calls the "eternal now"[1062] and what Selkin terms "the eternal and infinite One that underlies the apparent multiplicity of phenomena"[1063]. But more

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[1058] One exception to this would be Malcolm Day's study, *TT*, which recognises the significance of gratitude in Traherne.

[1059] Stewart, *TEV*, p.97.

[1060] Harold Fisch, *Jerusalem and Albion: The Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p.53. cited in Day, *TT*, p.67.

[1061] Day, p.68-71. See also Lynn Sauls, "Traherne's Debt to Puente's *Meditations*", *Philological Quarterly*. 50 (1971): 161-174.

[1062] Day, *TT*, p.79.

[1063] Carl M. Selkin, "The Language of Vision:Traherne's Cataloguing Style," p.94.

pertinently to this project, at the heart of the *Thanksgivings* is the dynamic of human need and divine plenitude and the overflowing of gratitude.

Gratitude, like love, is a free operation. In words that echo his earlier statements about love, Traherne writes of gratitude that "the essence of Gratitude consists in the freedom of its operation."[1064] And the expression of gratitude is an exercise in that freedom by which, as set out above in chapter four, we are fully human. The joy of the donor is gratitude freely given "Of which to rob GOD is a kind of *Spiritual Sacriledge*,"[1065]. Whereas to feel gratitude is to redouble the joy of the giver. This same principle is at work in our communication with each other. Another's joy is "an Object, and a Cause of ours…when we are the Authors of it"[1066]. And so Gratitude effects greater communion. Just as love is increased by being given away, so too, possession is multiplied to each and to others by its own exercise. Because each soul may participate in the happiness of every other soul, each soul's possession of the world increases the possession of every other soul. Stewart sees this as a form of narcissism; Day sees it as exactly the opposite -- a forgetting of the ego and an absorption into the divine. I see it as neither of these extremes, but as an exercise of virtuous reciprocity. In any case, the idea that possession may be increased by its own exercise makes every treasure a treasure upon treasure and gives grounds for the reduplicaion of gratitude.

[1064] *CE* p.271.

[1065] *CE* p.271.

[1066] *CE* p.271.

So also may gratitude multiply the depth of our communion with God. Our gratitude is love returned, the appropriate answer to God's desire:

> "These are the Things wher with we God reward.
> Our Love he more doth prize:
> Our Gratitude is in his Eys,
> Far richer than the Skies.
> And those Affections which we do return,
> Are like the Lov which in Himself doth burn."[1067]

Sandbank sees thanksgiving in Traherne as a part of "the doctrine of circulation" whereby all things that give must first receive. Gratitude returned for blessings given is evident in "The Circulation", "Amendment", and "The Recovery". In the last of these three, we may see one of Traherne's most forceful assertions that gratitude is what God expects and desires. Right apprehension may be the beginning of gratitude, but God seeks the full-bodied thing itself, the whole heart returned in praise:

> "Tis not alone a Lively Sence
> A Clear and Quick Intelligence
> A free, Profound, and full Esteem:
> Tho these Elixars all and Ends to seem
> But Gratitude, Thanksgiving, Prais,
> A Heart returnd for all these Joys,
> These are the Things by Him desird."[1068]

This gratitude is described most simply as "One Voluntary Act of Love"[1069]. By this is the world returned. By gratitude and love does the human soul completely fill its central position in the cosmological design. And so thanksgiving is a significant part of what

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[1067] "The Estate" ll.51-56.

[1068] "The Recovery" stanza 6.

[1069] "The Recovery" l.68.

Sandbank calls "a dynamic cosmos, a motion of love,... the returning of the physical world to God through its restoration to its initial intelligibility."[1070]

Gratitude is the concluding virtue in *Christian Ethicks*, not a separate virtue tacked on to the end of *Christian Ethicks* as an addendum, but a culmination of the virtues. It is, as Day argues, "the final virtue" [1071]. Not only is it the last virtue he considers in the long list of virtues which culminates in chapter XXXII "Of Gratitude", but its finality takes on greater significance when in Chapter XXXIII Traherne goes on to explore "The Beauty of Gratitude". And then to this he adds a further appendix to declare "how Gratitude and Felicity inspire and perfect all the Vertues". Day suggests that Traherne may have only realised the significance of gratitude as his work in *Christian Ethicks* progressed.

> "That Traherne becomes fully aware of this special character of Gratitude only as he nears the end of his work is demonstrated as much by the obviously growing enthusiasm with which he writes of Gratitude as by his having made no place for it in his intitial design, scarcely mentioning the word before the next to last chapter – as though in his own writing he is undergoing a process of discovery."[1072]

And so Gratitude is "the final virtue" in the fullest sense of the word; it is that virtue to which all the others tend. It consists not of desire but of love and knowledge, and yet it participates in the dynamic of desire by crowning the fulfillment of all desires with the added circlet of thankfulness. It is connected with both the themes of treasure and choice. It is about treasure since it concerns appreciating the worth of an object, concerns the righteous sight that prizes rightly and so brings the soul into agreement with the

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[1070] Sandbank, p.122-123.

[1071] *TT*, p.36.

[1072] *TT*, p.36-37.

divine. And it is about choice because, like all the other points along the way of communication and circulation, it is only real when given freely. Gratitude includes and implies a participation in communicaton and circulation between the soul and God and between the soul and other souls and is the proper poise of the soul towards God and towards other souls. It "is the sphere of all Vertue and Felicity". It is Traherne's understanding of the whole duty of man.

But as much as gratitude is the final virtue, it is also the first. Here, in the estate of grace and trial, gratitude is a virtue learned and practiced, but it was not always so.

> "Before I learned to be poor,
> I always did the Riches see,
> And thankfully adore:"[1073]

Traherne writes with regret. In the estate of Innocence, thankfulness is natural to the soul. For the estate of Misery one can only be grateful in retrospect. In the estate of Grace one may learn gratitude as the poise of the soul. In the estate of Glory all will be praise. Gratitude, like love, desire and satisfaction, and all that makes the soul divine, is natural in the first and final estates.

There is a kind of retrospective or intuitive thanksgiving implied in much of the poetry and most especially seen in those poems of wonder such as "The Salutation" and "Wonder". And we may see that gratitude in the regenerate is a kind of relearning of what was lost in the innocent. In "Silence" the prelapsarian soul had only this work to do:

> "The first and only Work he had to do,
> Was in himself to feel his Bliss, to view

[1073] "The Return" ll.14-16.

His Sacred Treasures, to admire, rejoyce
Sing Praises with a Sweet and Heavnly voice,
See, Prize, Give Thanks within, and Love
Which is the High and only Work, above
Them all."[1074]

Thankfulness here includes sight, prizing and love, and we may see gratitude not so much as a moment as a process or an attitude within a larger frame of action. This attitude of thankfulness and the appreciation of treasure that it implied was not the work of an infant because it was so small as to be suited to an infant's capacity; it was the work of the infant because only the soul unpolluted by custom was capable of so high and single a task.

Here, in the estate of grace and trial, Gratitude is an expression of the soul engaged in the divine dynamic of gift and receipt. As McFarland writes: "There is a response especially suited to the estate of grace, and that response is thanksgiving or gratitude, which is, in effect, a return of love for love given."[1075] True to form, the act of gift and the act of receipt are not separated by Traherne. The act of return by which we complete our purpose in the divine scheme of things is also the same act by which we receive, that by which, Traherne proclaims, we gain: "Now Love returned for Love is the Soul of Gratitude. In that act, and by it alone, we gain all that is excellent:"[1076]. Well, then, may Traherne assert that "Gratitude is all that is to be expressed here upon Earth, and above in

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[1074] "Silence" ll.21-27.

[1075] McFarland, "Thomas Traherne's *Thanksgivings* and the Theology of Optimism", p.4.

[1076] *CE* p.266.

Heaven."[1077]. This Gratitude is the first and final virtue, the correct poise of the soul relating it both to other souls and to God in desire and thankfulness, and in continued satisfaction of ever-present wants. In Traherne, gift and receipt are so intimately related that even as we give we desire, and as we desire we thank. "We see the Beauty and Glory of all, and offer it all up to him, with infinite Desire, our selves also with infinite Gratitude."[1078]

[1077] CE p.284.

[1078] *CE* p.252.

Conclusion

This thesis began by tracing the critique of Traherne as the "Poet of Felicity", how that label came to be attached to him and with what effect. In contrast to the notion of Traherne the naïve and contented, I have explored the dark side, if you like, of Traherne's felicity, that shadow of desire without which felicity has no depth, in order to show the inadequacy of that early label and to urge a new reading of this often misread poet and theologian. But this thesis is, of course, about more than a label. For in the infinite reaches of Traherne's desire is the very root of redemption. "You must want like a God that you may be satisfied like God." is the simplest statement of this theology. Want that is infinite and eternal, that is both passionate and prudent, insatiable want that speaks of infinite capacity, the want by which we know our treasures and in which we prize righteously with renewed sight, is the want of Traherne's redemptive desire. In the unique human position between power and act desire finds its strongest influence; for the human may choose and it is this free choice, informed by desire, that opens the possibility of participating in the great design of God. All that we experience of longing, the call of 'Som great thing' as Traherne describes it, our need of and response to an Other in its many forms, is part of the working out of divine desire. For Traherne's God is full of desire, communicating himself to a creation capable of reciprocating; so may the human soul participate in the dynamic of gift and return by which both the soul and the whole of creation are made new and offered again to the creator. In this the soul, the bride, is beautified, transformed, redeemed. Ultimately, in communion and union with

God, the soul may find felicity, not as the end state of a linear progress, but as a continuing experience of satisfaction and renewed desire.

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